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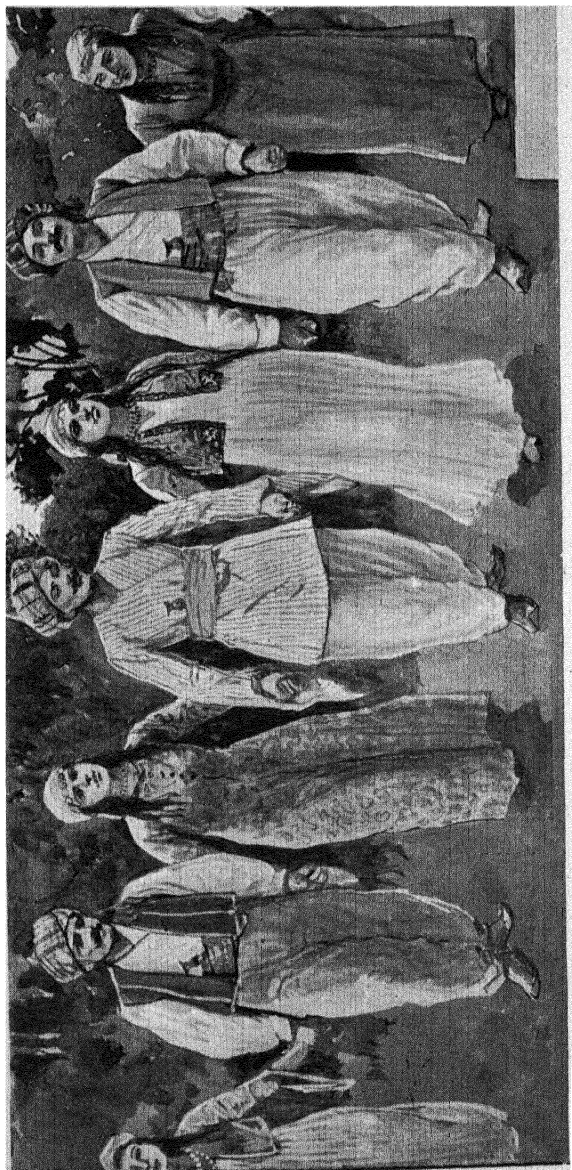
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FROM BATUM TO BAGHDAD



KURDS DANCING.

[Frontispiece.]

# FROM BATUM TO BAGHDAD

*VIA*

TIFLIS, TABRIZ, AND <sup>\*</sup> PERSIAN KURDISTAN /

BY

WALTER B. HARRIS, F.R.G.S.

AUTHOR OF

'A JOURNEY THROUGH THE YEMEN,' 'TAFILET,'

'DANOVITCH, AND OTHER STORIES,' ETC.

*WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AND MAPS*

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS

EDINBURGH AND LONDON

M D C C C X C V I



TO  
H. R. H.  
THE PRINCE OF WALES,  
THIS BOOK IS, BY SPECIAL PERMISSION,  
**D**edicated  
BY THE AUTHOR.





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*From a Photo by Colonel Mockler.*

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# FROM BATUM TO BAGHDAD.



## CHAPTER I.

### TANGIER TO TIFLIS.

AFTER perhaps the most severe gale that has occurred within the memory of man in these parts, in which the Spanish warship *Reina Regente* had been lost with all hands, I left Tangier on March 19, bound for the East, with no definite plans as to where my travels might ultimately strand me, but with the intention of making a start from Batum. Fortunately the sea during the two or three days which had passed since the termination of the gale had once more become normal, and, even with the few facilities for embarkation that Tangier can boast, I had no difficulty in getting on board the *Abdul*

Kader, one of the line of "Transatlantique" steamers that every fortnight call at Tangier.

It was not without regret that I bade adieu to the snow-white town nestling on the side of the steep hill, up which it verily seems to climb, for the winter had been one of continual rains and storms; and now that March was half over, there seemed every promise that we were going to enjoy the fine weather we had been hoping for ever since the end of December. But the movements of a traveller are always uncertain; and at the very moment when the flowers of my garden were beginning to show the blossoms that ought to have appeared a month or two before, at the very moment when every tree and every shrub began, weary with waiting for sunshine, to burst forth, I found myself destined to leave, and to seek for a few months a roaming existence in new lands.

To one accustomed to travelling, a departure, even if it be for a journey of long duration, means but little trouble, and a couple of hours at the most sufficed to gather my scanty belongings about me, to exhort my servants not to neglect house, garden, horses, or pets during my absence, and to gallop along the sands to the town for the last time.

Yet I was not leaving all behind me, for, as a souvenir of my home, as well as for more practical

purposes, I had decided that my Riffi servant, Mohammed—the same who had trudged the last winter so faithfully by my side through the dreary desert south of the Atlas Mountains—should accompany me.

So bidding adieu to friends, both European and native, on the little pier, which had suffered badly in the last fierce gale, we embarked in one of those rough heavy boats, rowed by sturdy Arabs, and pulled for the steamer.

In twenty minutes we were aboard, and half an hour later the thud of the screw had commenced, and Tangier and its mountain-fringed bay were being left far behind.

Three hours later we anchored at Gibraltar under the shadow of the great rock with its frowning forts and yellow town, and for an hour or two I hurried here and there ashore, busy with *visés* for passports and a little shopping.

The following day was spent at Malaga ; but there is little to see there, though the situation of the town is picturesque enough. As in duty bound, I visited the cathedral, one of those great churches that one finds so often in Spain. Whatever beauty its interior might boast—and there was little beyond its size—the bad taste of the Spaniards had entirely effaced by paper flowers and gilt stucco and tinsel. In the chancel, it is true, the stalls and organ boast some

fine carved wood, but the pictures are inferior and the architecture indifferent. Then a stroll along the sea-front to the east of the town, past many pretty villas and gardens, above which a hill surmounted by a fort keeps guard.

Besides my man Mohammed there were several other Arab passengers aboard, and the appearance of these, as they leant over the bulwarks of the steamer, was the signal for a shout of derisive laughter, curses, and stone-throwing on the part of the crowd of ill-fed and ill-conditioned boys who thronged the quay. For downright blackguardism nothing can beat the type of the youth of Malaga, whose expression, like their morals, is of as debased a type as could well be imagined. Apparently they have no occupation but to be rude to passers-by; and to the police and soldiery they pay not the slightest attention. Howls of filthy language greeted the appearance of the Moors, who, had they disembarked, would have run a great risk of being torn to pieces, so great is the antipathy of the Spaniards to their quondam conquerors, increased ten-fold by the affairs of Melilla last year. The captain of the steamer appealed to the police, but the two representatives of this noble body were busily employed in stealing figs from the cargo, and paid little or no attention to the fact that an infuriated crowd of the worst characters of Malaga—that is to say, the worst



in the world—were pelting the steamer with stones and mud. Affairs, however, reached a climax when one of the Moors, who spoke Spanish, asked after the health of General Margallo, the general who had been killed before Melilla, and then the captain was obliged to order them below, though the ill-conditioned crowd hooted and jeered until at sunset the steamer left. It is easy, when one sees the temper of the Southern Spaniard exhibited in fits such as this, to comprehend how it was that Sid Brisha, the Moorish envoy to Spain, was insulted and struck in the face, on his way to an audience with the Queen Regent, by a general in the Spanish army in the year of our Lord 1895.

After leaving Malaga our steamer was due to have called at the Spanish fortress of Melilla, on the Riff coast, but the weather did not permit, and we proceeded direct to Nemours, or Ghurasauats as the Moors call it, the most westerly seaport of Algeria.

It is a poor enough little place, lying at the mouth of a small valley, with a neglected square and one or two streets that speak of Spain and poverty, for few of the inhabitants are French. Some of the passengers landed, I amongst the number; and an amusing few hours we spent there, wandering up the valley by a good road to some large orange gardens, where, invited within by the hospitality of the wife of the Spanish owner, we sat in the shade

and chatted to the group of young Arabs who had guided us to this charming spot. Amusing bright fellows they were, quick with their tongues, and perfectly polite, a strange and pleasing contrast to the youth of Malaga. Everywhere we went they accompanied us, a score of them perhaps, and we made them run races for coppers, and play all manner of games. There is something pleasing about the Arab boy wherever one meets him, and our little contingent took us regularly under their protection, carrying our coats and umbrellas, and pointing out all the sights of the place—and they were few enough.

Then to a *café*, where we sat surrounded still by the crowd of urchins, who, though they knew well enough that I understood every word of their conversation, discussed us sedately. We were three—a French lady, a young Frenchman, and myself—and our relationship sorely puzzled them, until after a long discussion it was decided that we men were cousins, and the lady our maternal aunt. At this result they were evidently fully satisfied, and the conversation sought new channels.

We left Nemours at sunset, and the following morning at daylight were moored alongside the quay at Oran.

It is true, no doubt, that the French have to some extent civilised Algeria, yet one cannot help

preferring the Arab or Moor in his wild state, untrammelled by the, to him, unsuitable laws of civilisation. The man who in Morocco, in his native garb, is always picturesque, becomes, when tainted with European ways, a very eyesore in his dirty boots and coat, the latter often the cast-off article of some poor Spaniard, and worn above the native clothes.

There is nothing to see in Oran : it is all shabbily new, with its stucco boulevards and badly kept gardens and squares ; with its long steep streets of high houses and dusty alleys. A sort of second Gibraltar, preferable, indeed, to the British colony in its streets, but without the one charm that Gibraltar possesses, its lovely gardens. For Oran is a city given up to trade, inhabited principally by Jews, and it somehow reeks of commerce—not like London, for instance, vast commercial enterprise, but of that petty commerce which the Jews of North Africa know so well how to conduct.

The second day of our stay, for the Abdul Kader remained two days at the quay, I made, in company with one of our passengers, the Comtesse de S—, a charming excursion to the *pépinière* of Miserghin, some ten or twelve miles away. The drive was delightful, and we passed through open breezy common, here with a peep of the sea, but more often

of the big salt lake, the Sebkha, inland. From the summit of a hill one looked down upon Miserghin and the rich plough-land surrounding it, here green with young corn, there mile upon mile of vineyard ; and one felt that at least the French have done one great service, in that they have discovered the richness of the soil, and rendered it by careful cultivation far more productive than it was in the days when a couple of oxen trailed a wooden plough behind them and the Arab was undisturbed.

In a cloud of dust we drove into the tiny settlement of Miserghin, a French village with little or no trace of natives. At the *auberge* we lunched, and excellently too, poor as the place seemed, and then mounting once more our carriage, we drove, between avenues of lofty cypress and glossy-foliaged orange - trees, to the monastery around which the great gardens extend. Charming it was in the shade of the trees, for the day was hot, and we wandered here and there, watching the friars in the white robes tending the young trees and plants, or strolling in pairs or alone, missals in hand, amongst the dark foliage. The gardens are of great extent, and export not only their produce, but also trees, palms, and shrubs and plants, to almost all parts of Europe. Certainly Miserghin is as charming as Oran is ugly, for in every direction extend the long avenues, here

between rows of stately cypress, here under forest trees, and here again amidst bougainvillea and blossoming shrubs. A young friar took us round and pointed out the curious plants that they grow there—cacti of many sorts and strange creepers. There, too, are distilleries for spirits and liqueurs, and wine is made in large quantities.

The same evening we left Oran for Marseilles, our company augmented by half-a-dozen officers *en route* to fight in Madagascar, while the deck and third-class accommodation were full of soldiers.

The Balearic Isles were passed the following day, but we saw only Formentera, rocky and dreary in appearance, and Majorca. To the latter we steamed quite close, and its great mountain-peaks, dotted on their lower slopes with white cottages, spoke of the beautiful scenery that must exist in the valleys of that island.

Then Marseilles, noisy and smelly as usual, with its flourishing port and great wide streets, the whole dominated by the chapel and its golden Virgin. As we entered the harbour a steamer was just leaving for Madagascar full of soldiers, and from the quay arose shout after shout of "Vive la France! vive la République!" The enthusiasm was infectious, and one and all we waved adieu as they passed us, bound for the seat of the war.

Two days at Marseilles, and on the evening of March 26 we drove down in the dusk and embarked on board the *Circassie*, a steamer of the "Compagnie Paquet," bound for the Black Sea.

At sunrise the following morning we left the port and steamed between the rocky fortress - crowned hills that line the great harbour of Marseilles. The weather was fine. The first two days passed without incident. We were but three first-class passengers, and so every comfort was to be found. In the second class, however, where Mohammed was installed, and on deck, one could catch a glimpse, as it were, of the countries we were to visit. Turks, Greeks, Armenians, a Russian, Frenchmen, and a Spaniard—and yet only eleven passengers there! a conglomeration of type, a Babel of tongues.

Early on the morning of the 29th we steamed through the Lipari Islands, passing close amongst them, so close that every detail was apparent. Stromboli with its heavy smoke attracted most attention, though by no means the most picturesque. Every one of the islands seems to be inhabited, though one would choose any situation to reside in, it would be thought, in preference to the slopes of Stromboli! Yet even here the mountain was dotted with houses. An Italian sailor told me that the natives are free of all taxation—and that in Italy seems to

mean that rather than pay the heavy taxes the people seek a precarious home on islands that may at any time either blow up or sink down into the sea.

Later we entered the Straits of Messina, dotted on both sides with villages and vineyards, straggling high up the sides of the steep mountains that rise tier above tier on the Italian and Sicilian coast. Messina too, the town half hidden in filmy smoke; then Etna, covered with snow, whiter almost than the steaming fumes that issue from its crater. So still, so silent did it seem, that it was almost impossible to believe that such a short time ago the mountain was casting forth fire and destruction upon the land. Long after we had passed out of the straits—until dark even—its peak was visible, and the last we saw of it was its dark outline against the face of the setting sun.

We awoke the next morning to see, far away on our port-bow, the snow-capped mountains of Greece. Toward evening we approached nearer, and soon after dark passed the lighthouse on Cape Matapan.

For the whole of the next day we were in sight of land, amongst the islands of the Grecian Archipelago. The day was hazy, and but little more than the looming outline of rock and mountain was visible. Slowing down at night, we proceeded at reduced speed until the Dardanelles were reached in the

early morning of the last day of March, before daylight. At sunrise we steamed up to Chanak-keli, on the southern shore of the channel, and there anchored, for it is here pratique must be obtained before ships can proceed any farther in the direction of Constantinople. The morning was fine and warm, and the brilliant green of the fields, with their more distant background of forest, rock, and snow, formed a charming contrast to the wearying sight of sea. Chanak-keli is itself but a small place, straggling houses of more or less European construction, two or three deep, along the water's edge. A minaret or two give the cachet of orientalism that would otherwise be wanting. A few boats came off, one laden with the coarse but artistic pottery for which the place is celebrated, and from which it takes its name. I noticed that during the ten years that had elapsed since my former visit to Constantinople the decoration of the pottery had changed, and although one still found the strange long-neck jars and figures of horses, they were bedecked with crude colours and tinsel.

A couple of hours were sufficient to set the ship's papers in order and to take on board a dozen or so passengers, and by half-past eight we were on our way up the Dardanelles. Our new passengers were a strange crew,—a party of mollahs or priests,



some by no means poorly attired, and two or three wild mountaineers, fair men with blue eyes, very handsome, and strongly built. A soldier or two in dishevelled uniform and dirty boots completed the list. Then there was a spreading of carpets and rugs, and our new arrivals settled down on the deck and hatchways for their journey. The poor mountaineers, dirty and ragged, wept copiously,—one was in paroxysms of grief,—though it appeared that they were only *en route* to Constantinople in search of work. Yet even this journey of only some twelve hours must have meant much to these wild fellows, who more than likely had never left their native hills, situated who knows where. There was more that was pitiful than ludicrous in the tears of these great stalwart men, who were going to seek their fortune in strange lands. One could only hope for their success and their return once more, with a little wealth, to their native village.

It is extraordinary how quickly the native passenger settles down to his travels, and in a quarter of an hour after leaving Chanak the group of “priests” were breakfasting, sitting on their quilts and rugs, with all the comfort and composure of old travellers.

From the Dardanelles we were soon in the Sea

of Marmora, where the mountains and hills receded to north and south, and but for an occasional island one could see none of the details of the shore, except where here and there a white speck betold the presence of a mosque. Nothing could have been more beautiful than our passage through the Sea of Marmora. Not a breath of wind stirred the surface of the water, which was placid as a river, and from which on almost all sides, far away it is true, rose long lines of hills. Towards sunset the snow of Mount Olympus, to the south, turned to rosy gold, the great peak dominating the surrounding hills, far above which it towered clear and defined in the clear light.

At nightfall the lights of Constantinople were visible, and we entered the port soon after nine o'clock. The effect of the bright moonlight and thousands upon thousands of lamps was an entrancing one, and so clear was the night that every cypress on Seraglio Point stood out dark and clear from its surroundings of ivory-white buildings and grey domes.

The next morning after breakfast I took Mohammed ashore to show him a little of the town. As we passed through the narrow crowded streets of Galata and over the rickety wooden bridge that leads one over the Golden Horn to Stamboul, I

could not help being struck with the change that had taken place in Constantinople since my first visit nearly twelve years ago. Then there was still left some of the touches of orientalism that lent a charm to a city otherwise dirty and disagreeable. To-day there remains of course the beautiful Seraglio Point, with its cypress-trees and domes and kiosks, but elsewhere the East is fast disappearing under Western influence. The great mosques of Stamboul, with their tall minarets, still dominate the summit of the hill, but the foreground has changed: the picturesque, if tottering, buildings that surrounded them have given place to tall stucco barracks and Government offices; long streets of shops are rising where once narrow alleys led one in entangling network amongst the booths, and even the bazaars destroyed in the earthquake of 1894 are being rebuilt by a European company in European style. Yet still, as I threaded my way along the narrow streets, we were able now and again to reach some corner, dusty and deserted, that spoke of the old city, where for a time the houses of many storeys that to-day cap the hill of Pera were hidden from sight. We wandered here and there and everywhere,—now through half-fallen bazaars, now along well-laid-out streets,—and drank coffee in a tiny *café* outside the mosque of Saint

Sophia. Within the building a mollah was reading the Koran and explaining its precepts to a small crowd of Turks, mostly villagers from the country. A little group, late perhaps for the hour of afternoon prayer, rose and fell in unison in one of the side aisles. Here there was no change: the mosaics that have glittered for centuries still sparkle in portions of the roof; the great shields bearing the names of the successors of the Prophet in the Khalifate still look down upon one from under the great yellow dome.

Thence to the mosque of Sultan Ahmed, with its great windows of glass and its blue tiles, brilliant and airy in comparison to the other. The setting sun shone into the building in slanting rays of golden light, and even the four great pillars of enormous dimensions that support the roof and dome seemed to lose their oppressive heaviness. On leaving the building we visited the court without, with its surrounding colonnade of domes and columns, and its marble fountain—the whole empty and deserted.

The following morning we sauntered once more through the bazaars, pestered by guides and interpreters, and worried by the demands of the shopkeepers; and at noon, wandering to the bridge, we embarked on one of the many steamers that ply on the Bosphorus, and steamed up to Buyukderé.

Charming it all was in the bright spring sunshine, and the great palaces and residences of the Sultan, the Pashas, and the Ambassadors, ugly as most of them are at near view, gained a false beauty from the clear atmosphere. On board we were served with coffee and sweets, and the few hours' trip was pleasant enough, there being always something of interest to see, whether it be the beauty of the Bosphorus itself, or the strange passengers who embarked or alighted at the various villages we called at.

It was nearly sunset when we returned to Constantinople, and the smoke of the steamers in the port rendered indistinct the view of the town, which rose above the dusty haze an outline of pale mauve. It is such peeps as this, that one now and again obtains, that render true the saying that Constantinople is one of the most beautiful cities in the world ; for ashore there is little but dirt and greasiness, and even the crowd fails to-day to be picturesque, for nearly all the old costumes have died away, and broadcloth and patent-leather boots have taken their place. Twelve years ago the bridge between Galata and Stamboul was a sight worth seeing ; to-day it is but an unsavoury and dirty crowd of ill-clad poverty and overfed officialdom that one sees there. Even the poorest class seem to have adopted European costume,

which appears to consist of the cast-off clothes of the beggars of Europe.

Early the following morning, April 4, we steamed up the Bosphorus *en route* for the Black Sea. The weather continued fine, and not a ripple rose upon the oily surface of the sea. The land on the south was in view all day, and toward nightfall we approached it so nearly that from the ship we could see the burning brushwood, and the lights of a village or two. At early dawn we entered the harbour of Sinope to do our two days' quarantine, necessary before the northern ports of Asia Minor could be visited. The anchorage is in a roadstead, partly protected by the promontory of Tepé-Bunus, which is joined to the mainland by the narrow neck of sand on which the little town stands. From the ship we could see but little of the town beyond its grey walls and the minaret of its mosque.

At two o'clock the quarantine doctor came on board, and brought us the welcome news that as cholera no longer existed in Constantinople, there was no need for us to remain, and that the unpleasant process of disinfection would not be required. Great was the content of every one on board, and the number of native passengers that we had taken aboard at Constantinople literally beamed with pleasure when they heard that, instead of two days' delay—to say nothing

of being bathed in disinfectant—we were to proceed at once.

A few words as to our deck passengers, of whom we had some eighty aboard. Strange fellows they were the most of them, and stranger still their diverse costumes, which ranged from soiled linen and shiny broadcloth to pale green silk, from Circassian coats and boots to soft long fur-lined garments of fine materials. Arabs, Jews, Maltese, Greeks, Turks, Armenians, and Russians there were, and a host of tribesmen from who knows where, with their carpets and quilts and bedding, their *narghilés* and *samovars*. Some brought their womenkind; and for them, veiled from sight by their *yashmaks*, they built little tents of rugs; and the deck became as bright and picturesque a scene as one could find in the most oriental of bazaars. The weather was warm and fine, and many sang and played on tiny two-stringed guitars and flutes, and it was a matter of never-failing interest to wander about amongst this veritable menagerie of peoples, to listen to their strange languages, and drink a cup of tea, or take a few whiffs from the amber mouthpieces of their long-tubed pipes.

The coast continued in sight all day, long lines of abrupt hills rising in tiers from the shore, the highest covered in snow.

It was raining when the following morning we

anchored in front of the town of Samsun; but the weather cleared a little, though it remained cloudy all day, and the higher mountains behind the town were hidden. From the sea the appearance of Samsun is disappointing. Instead of finding, as one might imagine, a typical Turkish town, rows of neat white villas rise from the water's edge up the sides of the steep hills, and were it not for the presence of a mosque and one or two minarets, the place might have been anywhere on the coast of the south of France or Italy. However, ashore things are different, and one enters amongst streets and bazaars, lined with little boxlike shops and shaded by tall plane and acacia trees. The scene is picturesque enough, especially one long shady street leading to a large open market-place where the peasants were selling their wares and goods. Here, though European costumes were common enough, by far the greater portion of the population was dressed *à la Turk*. In the European quarter large shops filled with European goods exist—mostly, if not all, kept by Greeks; and every manner and variety of produce and manufacture is exhibited for sale, even to ready-made sailor suits for boys.

There is but little to see beyond the crowd passing in the streets; for even the mosques show no signs of handsome architecture, and the other buildings



are all more or less of European type—a few old wooden houses with projecting upper storeys being almost all that exists typically Turkish. At a *café*—a large clean room surrounded by a divan—we drank coffee, watching the long lines of heavily built camels passing along the street, and the rattling springless carts, with their canvas covers often brightly decorated, with which traffic with the interior is carried on. In the bazaars there was but little of interest. Few indeed are the travellers who visit Samsun, and there can be but little or no demand for curiosities. A few antiques were shown us, but either in poor condition or false—the former especially; while some badly manufactured coins pretending to be of Alexander and Philip spoke to the fact that even in these out-of-the-way places, where antiquities ought to be found, false coins are not uncommon.

We remained all day discharging cargo at Samsun, but I found three or four hours ashore amply sufficient to see everything several times over and to drink coffee more than once; so early in the afternoon we returned to the ship, where we found our deck passengers largely augmented, and a body of Turks amusing themselves with music and dancing. Very cheery and bright the new additions were, and they settled themselves down on board,

spreading their carpets and quilts at once. The dancing, such as it was, offered neither any great interest nor grace. A row of men holding hands trod a sort of measure, now and again varying the steps, or approaching one another, crossing their arms, or joining in a ring. Like most oriental amusements, it is monotonous, though even more so was the whining accompaniment droned out upon a small three-stringed instrument, played with a short bow.

More picturesque were the large number of Armenian peasants, who, fleeing from Turkish misrule, were *en route* to Batum to seek a home in Russian territory. Men, women, and children of all ages there were, and even babies in cradles. The smaller children were decidedly pretty in their bright-coloured clothes.

Soon after sunset we left Samsun, arriving some hours later at Kerassund. The situation of this small town is a charming one. Like Sinope, it stands on the neck of land that joins a promontory to the mainland. Above it, high on the rocky hill, stand the ruins of an old fortress. The surroundings of peaked and wooded mountains add much to render beautiful the little place, which from the sea is far more typically Turkish than Samsun. We did not go ashore, as a couple of hours were

sufficient to discharge our cargo ; and shortly after 8 A.M. we were *en route* for Trebizond, passing along a coast of broken mountain and wooded hill picturesque in the extreme.

As it was to be my lot to spend only a few hours ashore at Trebizond, it would be absurd to attempt here any full description of the interesting old town, of which, to tell the truth, I saw very little. As at Sinope and Kerassund, the original founders of Trebizond seem to have chosen one of the few rocky promontories that jut out into the sea, and offer a little protection for shipping, as the site of their town.

From the sea the place presents a charming appearance, the town climbing up the steep hillside, the old ruins of the fortifications peeping up here and there amongst the houses. Away on one spur a dense cluster of cypress-trees, outlining the brow of the hill, mark the cemetery, from which the mountain behind rises precipitously. On the flat-topped spur of rock that juts out into the sea are some fortifications and modern Turkish buildings, apparently barracks.

We landed at the custom-house quay, and, after a careful scrutiny of our passports, were allowed to proceed ashore. The way into the town leads by a steep road between rather dilapidated-looking dwell-

ings into the principal street of the place, which, excepting the varied costumes of the country-people, offers no great attraction either from a picturesque or any other point of view. Near the centre of this street are some ill-kept public gardens where, on the afternoon I spent there, a military band discoursed music.

I saw none of the "sights" of Trebizond,—such as they are,—preferring to pass the few hours ashore in loafing in the streets and gardens and watching the strange medley of peoples and races that congregated there. Poor Mohammed, in his Moorish clothes, attracted a large but well-behaved crowd, who gazed in wonder at his brown *jelab*. The police, however, interfered in our behalf, and a couple of good-natured stalwart "bobbies" kept us company for the rest of the day, showing us whatever there was to see, and delighted with an inconsiderable *bakshish* when we left. Decent polite fellows they were, and their presence a real comfort, as once or twice, so large was the gathering of onlookers, all traffic, as well as our own, was blocked.

Toward evening we returned once more to the Circassie, to witness one of the loveliest of sunsets, for the sun went down behind the snow-peaks that rise above the mountains at the foot of which the town stands, and the whole scene was swathed in

purple light, rendered even more lovely by the faint smoke of the town. Certainly Trebizond is best seen from the sea.

The sun had been risen an hour or two when we left the following day for Batum.

The voyage from Trebizond to Batum was perhaps the pleasantest part of our whole journey by sea. The water, calm as the proverbial mill-pond, reflected on its surface the huge peaks of snow that lay to the south and east of us, towering range above range into the blue sky. Certainly the Black Sea had shown us none of its terrors so feared by the mariners of old, for from the moment we entered it on leaving the Bosphorus until we steamed into the harbour of Batum it had presented an almost changeless calm. Nor were any of us sorry, for the Circassie had discharged a large quantity of cargo at Constantinople and at the ports on the north coast of Asia Minor at which we had touched, and she was therefore very light. The least wind would have set her rolling, and even the best of sailors has no fault to find with a steady ship and placid sea.

Away to the north, as we neared Batum, appeared the rosy peaks of the Caucasus, while ahead and to the south rose, almost from the very coast, mountains of forest and rock and snow.

It was still early in the afternoon when Batum

came into sight, a white line on the low promontory that juts out into the sea—the alluvial soil carried down by two rivers, the Batum and the Choruk. An hour later we were steaming into the harbour, filled with shipping, and at four o'clock made fast to the shore, stern on to the quay. But the arrival in port of the steamer by no means meant that we could proceed ashore at once, for the Russian police and harbour authorities seldom if ever hurry themselves, and we lay a full hour before there were any signs of either the doctor of the port or the police coming on board. However, at length a boat put off and the officials arrived. One has heard so much of the extreme amount of red-tapeism of the Russians that, without reason perhaps, one always expects difficulties at their custom-houses. Yet, as had been my experience on a former occasion when entering Russian territory, the examination of baggage was a mere formality, and not a single package of mine or even Mohammed's bundle was opened. Our passports were returned to us at once, and within ten minutes or a quarter of an hour after the arrival of the authorities I found myself safely ashore *en route* through the well-laid-out streets to the Hôtel de France, whose amiable proprietor, M. Charpentier, had been a fellow-passenger on the Circassie from Marseilles. Batum possesses about 19,000 inhabit-

ants, for the most part Russian subjects, though there is a considerable French colony there. The town, which was ceded to Russia after the Russo-Turkish war, was formerly little more than a small Turkish village, but to-day possesses all the attractions of a large commercial place. The streets are wide and often planted with trees, the houses are well built and handsome, and there is all the bustle and stir of prosperity in this city situated at the extremity of the Black Sea. Beyond its political and strategical importance, it owes its prosperity to the large output of mineral oil, which, transferred across Transcaucasia by railway, is here shipped to Europe, India, and China. Batum literally exhales petroleum, and the odour is seldom absent, and when the wind blows from the north-east over the reservoirs in which the oil is stored, the result is by no means pleasant.

We were early at the station, and, thanks to the aid of a guide from the hotel, we found no difficulty in procuring our tickets and registering our luggage. Mohammed, who had never in his life seen a train before, thought the whole station—and the station at Batum is by no means a small one—was going to Tiflis, and accordingly arranged the luggage on one of the seats and made himself comfortable for a long journey in the *refreshment-room*. It was a great dis-

appointment when he discovered that the bar with all its diversity of cakes and fruit was not going with us.

A strange medley of peoples and races crowded the platform at the departure of the train, and shortly before leaving a very nicely dressed and tidy Chinaman stepped into the carriage in which we had settled ourselves. He spoke English remarkably well, and told me that he was the head man of a number of Chinese coolies who had been brought to the hills around Batum for the purpose of cultivating tea.

Passing first amongst the large oil-reservoirs that line the north-east side of the port, we emerged into charming country. The railway here skirts the sea, which extends away to the left, while on the right rise the mountains. This site has been chosen by the richer inhabitants of Batum as a favourite suburb, and the foothills, amongst which one travels, are dotted with charming summer residences, the greater part built of wood and painted white. But what is more pleasing even than these delightful abodes are the gardens and scenery by which they are surrounded. Every variety of pine and fir seems to flourish in the park-like glades, while on every side huge forest trees, far older than the gardens, are to be seen. In many places the jungle-covered hills have not yet been cleared, and here one can see the dense



vegetation that abounds along the warm coast of the Black Sea. Such spots as these consist of jungle as thick as in the tropics, but the trees are acacias, holly, and oak, and many other varieties, while the brushwood is, in spring, a blaze of rhododendrons and yellow azaleas, with the perfume of which latter the air is full. Blackberries, clematis, and bignonia, and many kinds of ivy and other creepers, hang in festoons amongst the branches of the trees, and the whole offers an appearance of impenetrable beauty. So thickly do the forests grow that in many places the trees are so crowded together as never to gain their full proportions. It is amongst hills thus wooded that the merchants of Batum have cleared tracts of land and planted themselves gardens of trees from the tropics and the snow-clad Caucasus—long avenues of pines and firs, beds of palms and azaleas, of New Zealand flax and tulip trees. For this a background of forest-clad mountains tipped with glistening snow, while away to the north the long white line of the Caucasus shows up clearly above the plains and the sea.

From the hills we emerged into the plains of Mingrelia, rich and well cultivated, especially with maize, and dotted with large villages, one and all with their typical sheds raised from the ground on high poles. The construction of every village house is much the

same, being built of the trunks of trees in the manner known in America as "log" huts. A few possess more pretensions, being boarded and painted white, but with these exceptions the houses of the villages in the plains much resemble one another. The fertility of this plain of Mongrelia, watered by the river Rion, is easily judged when one sees the numerous patches where the forest has not yet been cleared. On the very edge, it may be, of a well-ploughed maize-field commences a dense and impenetrable jungle of tree and shrub and creepers, with swampy pools purple with irises.

The railway stations are large and well built, and all appear to possess excellent refreshment-stalls, well supplied with food and drinks. But it is on the platform and not within that the centre of attraction for the traveller is to be found, in the strange groups of peasants and others who crowd down, either out of curiosity to see the train and its passengers, or else to sell their wares,—for the stations become, for the few minutes that the trains remain, a centre of busy bargaining between the peasants and the passengers. Pigs, lambs, fowls, turkeys, and geese, and higher in the mountains chestnuts, apples, and bread, are all brought for sale, and a demure and well-dressed young officer in our compartment purchased for some small sum a couple of young sucking-

pigs, which, safely stored in a sack, travelled with us to Tiflis under the seat.

But even more than in the wares exposed for sale were we interested in the people who thronged the stations. Of all classes they seemed to be, though here the races were fewer than at Batum, and the Georgians of Mingrelia largely predominated. It is true that the extreme beauty of this race has not been overrated, and even from the types that one came across at the various railway stations of a day's journey one could have picked out as fine a body of men as could be found anywhere. There is no savagery in their appearance; on the contrary, if there is any fault to find, it is in their over-refinement of looks. Dressed nearly all in the fine black *cherkess*—the close-fitting coat with its long loose folds almost like a skirt, which reaches below the knees—with an under coat of black or white silk or cloth, its high collar of the same material, the whole bound at the waist by a silver belt with its dangling plaques and gorgeous dagger, there is a simplicity that shows off to advantage the Georgian type, of dark arched eyebrows, white skins and pink cheeks, and fine cynical mouths. On the head a small cap of loosely curled black astrachan fur is worn, while soft black high boots complete a costume of singular taste and beauty. The bearing of the

men is excellent, the head is held high, and in stature they are one and all tall. In fact, a typical



*Types of Georgians.*

young Georgian, with his fine features and simple dress, is as handsome a man as one could ever see.

For some hours we continued over these plains,

which gradually narrowed as we proceeded farther up the valley. Both to north and south a long line of snow-peaks bounded the horizon, and swept in majestic curves to the plains, covered with dense forest up to the snow-level, and some to their very summits. Look which way one might, the same beautiful scenery surrounded one.

It was not long before we were amongst the mountains, ascending along the course of the river Rion, through a valley which, as we proceeded, became narrower every minute, until at length our way lay through a veritable gorge, shut in with high forest-clad and rocky precipices, above which appeared the snow, no longer a great distance above us. Below us, now on this side and now on that, leaped the river, roaring as it rushed on its downward course of rapid and fall. By bridges of excellent construction we were continually crossing the river, now skirting the precipice on its right bank, now on its left. The enormous engineering difficulties and the great expense of the making of this line are apparent every moment. A climax of both is reached when for nearly ten minutes' duration the train rattles one through the tunnel of the watershed between the rivers flowing to the Caspian and the Black Sea. This tunnel took four years to excavate (1886-1890), and some 2000 workmen were employed in its con-

struction. One emerges into the valley of the Kur, the river on which Tiflis is situated. High mountains enclose the valley on every side except to the east, where it stretches away, widening as it proceeds, until it becomes a veritable plain. The country had completely changed during our passage through the tunnel, for in the place of the high precipices and mountain villages of wooden huts, and the forest-clad mountains, one was passing over well-cultivated level ground dotted with little townships, and amongst herds of cattle and sheep.

Darkness came on and rain fell in heavy drops, until at ten o'clock the guard woke us from slumber by telling us Tiflis was in sight. From the window of my carriage I could see its thousands of lamps sparkling in the wide valley, and half an hour later we were rattling over the badly paved roads of the town *en route* to the Hôtel de Londres.

## CHAPTER II.

## TIFLIS.

TIFLIS, the capital of Transcaucasia, with its population of nearly 100,000 souls, owes its name and probably also its site to the hot springs which exist in its immediate neighbourhood. It is curious to notice throughout the whole oriental world how general is the custom of fixing upon some such natural but uncommon feature as this for the site of a city. No doubt to the ancients, as to the people of the East to-day, hot springs were marvels that excited not only the admiration but also the religious zeal of the natives, and to-day one finds in one's travels that almost wherever such springs do exist, the population of the neighbourhood, and even people residing at long distances, make pilgrimages to the spot, though as a rule the medical properties of the water are little understood. In the case of Tiflis, the natural features of the country added further ad-

vantages which, in the warlike days of the fifth century A.D., could not well be overlooked. For the river Kur, with its steep rocky banks and the high mountains beyond, would tend to render any attack upon the place, if not futile, at least extremely difficult. And in those days of early Georgian and Armenian kings, when the wild Caucasian tribes harried them from the north, and the devastating hordes of Persians and Mongols from the south and south-east, not to mention the invasions of Greek and Roman, the defences of a city were of the utmost importance. And so it was that near the close of the fifth century A.D., King Vakhtang of Georgia built a town upon the site of a still earlier Persian fortress, utilising its ruins for his fortifications. With so much zeal was the building of the town undertaken and carried on, that only a few years later, Dachi, the thirty-fourth sovereign of his dynasty, who held the throne from 499 to 514 A.D., made Tybylsys-Kalake, as it was then called, his capital.

It is beyond the scope of a work such as this to attempt to enumerate the various conquests and reconquests that the city has seen in its centuries of vicissitude,—and on tradition more than on history are those accounts based ; yet it can be stated almost with certainty that in as many centuries Tiflis has seen utter destruction no fewer than eight times, at



the hands of Mongols, Persians, Greeks, and Turks. The first historical mention that can be fully relied upon is the invasion of Iberia or Georgia, by Pompey, in Roman times, when the Bagratid dynasty of Georgians held the throne, having seized it in the eighth century, and continuing to keep it in their line until 1801, when, wearied with the continual invasions of Persian hordes under Agha Mohammed Khan, the last king sought the protection of Russia, and merged his kingdom into that vast empire.

The present town of Tiflis lies on both banks of the river Kur,—the official and old part on the south, and the newer and more specially residential quarter on the north. It is along the former that the long lines of the old fortifications, massive walls and beetling towers, are found, looking down upon the handsome squares and boulevards that Russian enterprise and Russian capital have called into existence. To-day the Kur, which once formed the principal defence of the place on the north, serves only as a water-supply and for carrying off the drainage of the town, with the additional attraction that the turbid stream, rushing between its steep precipices of rock, is one of the most picturesque features of an already romantic scene. As far as the eye can wander in every direction the horizon is bounded by ranges of mountains: here the steep

hills of rock that rise in the immediate neighbourhood; there the distant snow-peaks of the great range of the Caucasus, faint against the blue sky. The actual surroundings of Tiflis, save where the Russian Government has caused gardens and trees to be planted, are dreary and wanting in vegetation, for the destructive habit of all orientals of deforesting land without ever replanting has left its indelible mark upon the aspect of the country, which to-day wears a rugged, bare, yellow appearance.

Before entering upon any description of the city, some idea must be given as to the strange conglomeration of inhabitants that flock its streets, for it is to the crowd that much of what is interesting in Tiflis is owing. True, the Armenian, with his shiny broad-cloth and Jewish type of countenance, adds little to the attraction of the place, though it must be confessed that from the traveller's point of view, if from no other, he is most useful. Nearly all the banks and most of the shops are in his hands, from his ranks spring the guides and interpreters, and go where one will one finds him a ready linguist and polite, so long as he is paid. But from the artistic point of view the lazy, good-natured Georgian is charming, as he swaggers about with his handsome looks and becoming costume. True, he is a lazy, pleasure-seeking creature, about whose morals the

less said the better, but his appearance of good looks and good nature, and his dandy airs, seem to render him a favourite everywhere. No one seems to realise better than he that he has the reputation of coming from the purest stock in the world, and of being a member of its handsomest race. Nor is this reputation belied as he is seen, in his long white coat with its silver or gold cartridge or powder tubes sewn across his chest, with his cap of white lamb's-wool perched jauntily on one side of his head, to say nothing of his personal charm of countenance, which is often of the greatest beauty. Round his waist is a silver or gold girdle from which hang a handsome sword and straight dagger, both cased in the same precious metals. Of the Persians one sees but little in the European quarters. One must seek the narrow dirty bazaars near the river-bank to obtain a glimpse of these scowling sallow fanatics, in their dark clothes and tall black lambskin caps. As a matter of fact, though Persian subjects, they are not of Iranian blood, but belong to the wild Turkman tribes which overran Persia, and whose descendants, now known as Turkis, to-day hold almost the entire northern part of the dominions of the Shah. But to the traveller it is the Tatar, after the Georgian, who proves of the greatest interest. True, he has little

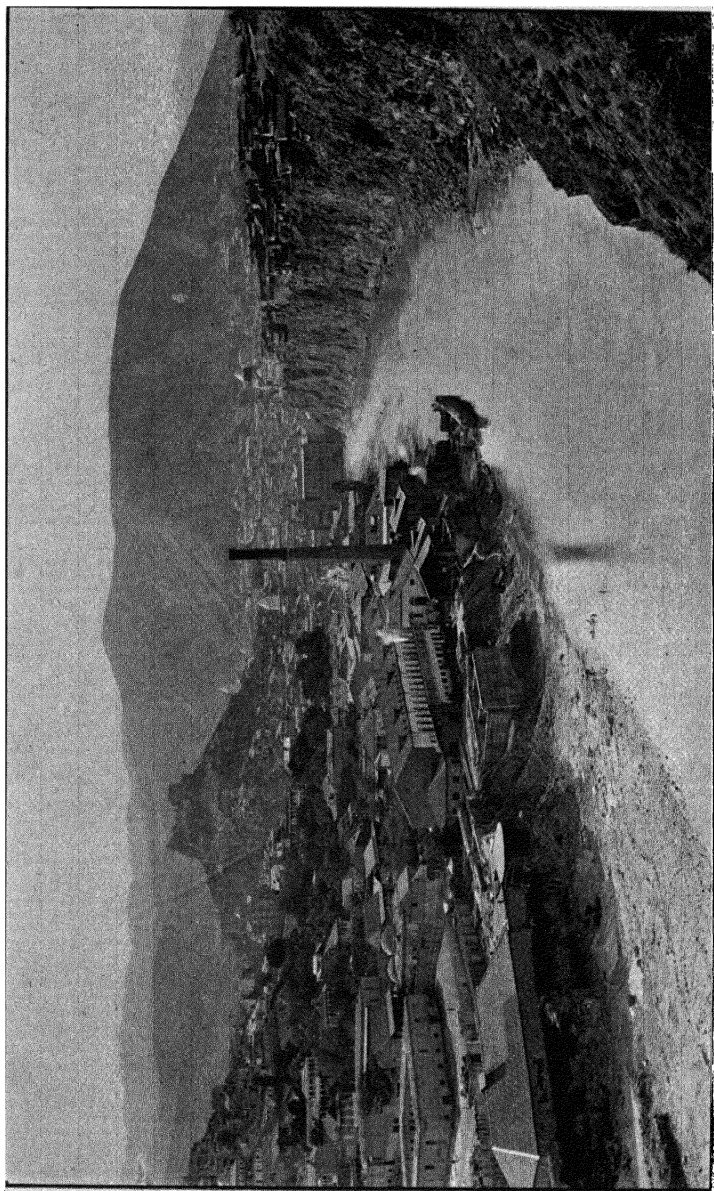
beauty either in feature, figure, or costume to recommend him, but nevertheless there is a peculiar attraction, humorous rather than ornamental perhaps, about the squat, narrow-eyed tribesman, in his ragged clothes and absurd *papak* or enormous hat of ragged wool. To attempt, during a short stay in the country, to unravel the complicated tribal system of the race is an impossibility, so one must deal with him merely as he appears as an item of the crowd, in his baggy trousers, and blue cotton coat with its outstanding pleated skirt, and his ridiculous head-gear mentioned above. In Tiflis he is everywhere: here driving a string of lanky camels with their clanging bells of brass and copper; here sitting silently smoking his *kalyan*—water pipe—in one of the painted and carved balconies of the many caravanserais in the oriental quarter of the town; there, again, purchasing a bundle of European goods to take away with him and trade in his native steppes. And to this picture of oriental peoples must be added the Russian soldier, stolid and upright, well-fed and well-uniformed, polite and religious, doffing his cap to the *ikons* at the street corners, the very picture of health and courage. Nor is the Russian the sole type of the army of the empire, for the mounted Cossacks, mud-bespattered and none too tidy, canter

their ponies up and down the streets, setting out for, or arriving from, some outlying station or distant town — and of them, with their absolute indifference to food and temperature, one cannot form too high an opinion. Scatter these varied races on the streets of Tiflis, add types of all the wild tribes of the Caucasus, with a sprinkling of officers in uniform and well-dressed ladies, and one can obtain some idea of the appearance of the inhabitants of the town.

As to the city itself a few words must be said. The principal street is the Dvartzovaya-oulytza, or Palace Street—a wide boulevard, in which are situated not only the palace of the Governor-General, but also the handsome new opera-house, the as yet unfinished cathedral, and most of the best shops. And it is when one finds such streets as these in an Asiatic town that one commences to realise the immense organising and absorbing power of Russian government, that can, in a region so far removed, and connected directly neither by rail nor sea with the fatherland, raise up a city that rivals, in this street at least, any capital of Europe. Nor is it difficult to solve the problem, for ask where one will and of whom one will, to whom the prosperity not only of Tiflis but also of the whole of Transcaucasia is owing, the reply will be the same—

to the Grand Duke Michael, brother of the Czar Nicholas II., who for eighteen years held the Viceroyalty of this vast province, and for whose return the inhabitants have never ceased to pray. Every reform, every road and railway, every school and hospital—in fact, all that is good in the country—owes its origin to this Prince of Progress and Civilisation.

The palace is a handsome building of great size, which, while possessing perhaps no great architectural beauty, is amply suited to its purpose, and cannot fail to impress not only the native of the country, but also the civilised traveller, with the magnificence of the Russian Court. Within it is gorgeously decorated: great clusters of palms, innumerable glass chandeliers, and a quantity of gold paint, give it the most brilliant appearance, a fit setting for the gorgeous semi-European, semi-oriental crowds that flock its *salons* on reception nights. Next to the palace stands the new cathedral, now nearly completed. It is built in Byzantine style, much gilded and bedomed, and though perhaps a trifle gaudy, seems exactly suited to the place and climate. It is a building of great size, and forms already the handsomest and most magnificent structure in the town. Not far from this spot is the excellent museum—which, again, is entirely owing to Russian influence—where can be seen a remark-







able collection of things typical of Transcaucasia, from life-size wax groups of the types of the tribes to the various household utensils in use in the thousand and one valleys of the mountains. But to the sportsman the principal attraction will be the large collection of the stuffed animals and birds of the country, from the magnificent wild cattle from Elburz to the tigers of Lenkoran. Under Dr Radde, the curator of the museum, the collection has largely increased, and is still increasing.

Before one turns one's steps to explore oriental Tiflis, with its mazes of narrow streets and bazaars, there remain yet a few sights to see in the more modern town. Especially attractive are the public gardens, situated on the left bank of the Kur, some little way removed from the centre of the town. Here at times an excellent military band discourses music, and all the fashionable world of Tiflis parades. It is difficult, then, when walking under shady trees, surrounded by a well-dressed European crowd, to imagine oneself in an Asiatic town. Nor are these public gardens the sole resort that the traveller can find to walk in at leisure; below the crumbling walls of the ruins of the Georgian and Persian fortresses the Government has laid out a botanical garden, where most of the trees and shrubs indigenous to the country can be seen,—examples ranging from the more

luxurious vegetation of the Black and Caspian seaboards to the firs and pines of the higher Caucasus, for the elevation of Tiflis allows of the growing of both. These gardens, half wild, half tended, form a most attractive spot. Below them tumbles an affluent of the Kur in a series of falls and cascades, while above tower the ruins and the mountains beyond. From these gardens I climbed and scrambled by a mere track up to the little monastery and church of St David, perched almost in the face of the precipice high above the town. From this spot a panorama of Tiflis and the surrounding country is obtained, and the exertion of the cliff climb is well repaid; the view of the town is admirable, and stretched out before one is the magnificent prospect of the peaks of the Caucasus. The church is named after David, the Syrian Father, who resided here. The first structure was erected in the fourteenth century, though the present edifice is of more recent date. The latter owes its material to the barren women of the neighbourhood, who, in their desire for offspring, bore up upon their shoulders all the material of which the church is built. In spring they still pay pilgrimages to the spot. Two tombs of widely different men and different times lie beneath the floor of the church, that of St David himself, and the other of Gryboiedoff, the Russian author, who was murdered, together with all his suite, when

filling the post of Russian Minister at Teheran in 1828. His remains, after being exposed to the fury of the fanatical mob for three days, were, it is said, only recognisable from a scar upon one of his hands.

Of European Tiflis there remains but little to be said, unless it be to avow the great comforts of that most excellent hostelry, the Hôtel de Londres, over which Madame Richter and her son so ably preside, and which well bears out its reputation of being one of the most comfortable hotels, not only in Russia, but almost in the world. And none knows better than the traveller how much of his pleasure depends upon the quarters he finds to lodge in. One other fact, too, remains to be noticed, the entire absence of the Continental system of *cafés*; search far and wide, there is nothing that answers to the idea of the *café* of France and Europe in general.

From the civilised part of Tiflis, with its handsome streets and shops, it is little more than a step to the maze of winding alleys and narrow byways that form the oriental quarter and the bazaars. It is here probably that the traveller will find most to interest him, for though the bazaars offer but little attraction to him who is conversant with those of Persia and the East, any one fresh from Europe cannot fail to be struck with their characteristics. What a bustle and stir of life there is there! what mud in wet weather,

and dust in fine! what dirt in both! But, suffer as one may from either, or from the pushing, brawling crowd of humanity, and the offensive smells with which the streets are filled, no one ought to be deterred from a leisurely stroll through the oriental town.

Cosmopolitan as this quarter is, it possesses characteristics to be seen probably nowhere else in the world. The great ill-built caravanserais, with their overhanging balconies of painted and carved wood, belong neither to Russia nor Persia, though the *samovar* (urn) and *kalyan* (water pipe) hail from each respectively, and without a number of both no balcony, and scarcely a shop, is complete. Often the footpath for passengers consists of a narrow curbstone from which the wayfarer is hustled and bustled by the hurrying crowd, only to be hurled back again against the walls of the houses by a lumbering camel which usurps all the room and all the sound of the street by its awkward bulk and its clanging bells. Everywhere are strange narrow-eyed Tatars and Turkis of Northern Persia, hailing one another in unknown guttural tongues; gaily dressed Georgians and natives of Daghestan, gaudy with weapons; cringing Jews and Armenians; policemen yelling out orders which seem never to be obeyed,—a very Babel of nations and languages, such as must delight the heart of the traveller.

Every now and then rattles by some open waggon, painted scarlet and green, with the *ivoshek* yelling to the crowd to make way, as the clumsy wheels scatter people and mud right and left. Then down through the narrow arched arcade in which the gloomy Persians, in a gloomy atmosphere, vend their wares, and out amongst the great tall caravanserais that stand on either side of one of the bridges over the Kur, under which the turbid yellow stream whirls and tumbles as if anxious to fly the dirt and noise of the city. Then back through the open bazaars, where sit the armourers, the silversmiths, the vendors of musical instruments and curios, of carpets and furs, of wines and comestibles. Everywhere there is something to see, something to interest. Here, perhaps, one stands to look at the furriers' goods, from neat little lambskin caps for the Georgians, to the huge, ugly, overgrown, mushroom-like head-gear of the Tatars; here, again, the armourers attract one with their display of a strange mixture of Eastern and Western goods, from Smith and Wesson revolvers—made in Russia—to Daghestan daggers, old flint-lock guns with inlaid stocks, and swords and knives from everywhere. Thence on to the silversmiths, where are the bowls from which the pleasure-seeking Georgian loves to quaff his wine, and the noted *niello* work of the country with its designs in black on a

silver ground. Then, again, one pauses to listen as a vendor of long key-boarded guitars strikes some little plaintive melody from the thin strings.

I spent Easter in Tiflis, and thus had an opportunity of witnessing the beautiful service which, in the Orthodox Church, marks the end of Lent. The ritual of the Russian Church, together with the architecture and decoration of the churches, lends not a little to the impressiveness of such scenes, and the old Byzantine cathedral of Tiflis formed as picturesque a background to the religious ceremony as could well be imagined. On account of the crowd that throngs the midnight service which ushers in the great national holiday of Russia, it is necessary to take one's stand—for there are no seats—at an early hour, and I had already been in the cathedral for nearly three hours when the ceremony commenced. There is no necessity here to enter into any of the details of the ritual of this beautiful service of the Orthodox Church, for at this spot I am dealing with it solely as an effect, a most telling reminiscence of a visit to Tiflis.

The service commences in the dull gloom, for, with the exception of a few lights upon and in the vicinity of the altar, the church is unlit. But this gloom tends to heighten the effect of the group of richly robed and mitred priests that throng the steps, chant-

ing in turn with the choir of unaccompanied boys' and men's voices the music of the service. In contrast to the group about the altar steps was the dark heaving crowd, half hidden in the filmy clouds of the incense and the dusk of the building. At length, as midnight approached, the priests and choir filed down the church and left the building by the main entrance, one or two alone remaining within. Then, as a rocket without gave the sign of midnight, a loud knocking commenced at the door, which was repeated several times. On the gate being opened the priests and choir hurried in, crying out again and again, "Christ is risen! Christ is risen!" Each bore in his hand a lighted taper, from which the nearer members of the crowd lit their own, passing the flame from candle to candle, for every one in the building bore a taper. It took but a minute to change the entire scene, and as the priests made their way to the altar, swinging their censers as they went, the gloom of the church disappeared, and the building was lit by thousands upon thousands of candles: where, before, the dusk had prevented one seeing either the church or the crowd, every picture and detail of the decoration of the building, and every figure in it, became distinct. The seething mass of humanity took form and shape; and where, before, one recognised only dark figures in an incense-laden twilight, one recog-

nised now the officers of the Government, in uniforms bespangled with orders, accompanied by their wives and daughters, and, beyond, a vision of a thousand upturned faces full of reverence and attention. The altar, now a blaze of light, sparkled and shone with its treasures, and the richly jewelled mitres and cloth-of-gold robes of the priests dazzled the eyes.

Then, as the congratulations of Easter were taking place, I pushed my way out through the crowd, into the brightly-illuminated streets, in time to see the Governor-General drive away, escorted by his body-guard of Cossacks, who galloped beside his carriage, bearing blazing torches on long poles.

Easter Sunday was high holiday; every man, woman, and child in their best clothes, intent upon pleasure and enjoyment, and the public gardens were thronged, while military bands made music. What an echoing and re-echoing of congratulations! what a bowing to the revered *ikons* at the church doors and street corners! and, as the day progressed, what a number of men who had enjoyed themselves a little too much! But there was no fighting, no roughness, and the police are lax upon this great feast, and, as long as no fighting takes place, do not interfere. The streets are full of hurrying *droshkies*, with their burdens of officers in uniforms and ladies, paying their visits of congratulation, or driving to the palace.



Ay ! Easter Sunday in Tiflis is a sight to be seen, and never have I witnessed, in spite of its various nationalities, a better-behaved crowd—though sometimes far from sober—than thronged the streets and gardens on this feast-day.

Such, briefly, is Tiflis ; a city presenting two entirely different characteristics—the Oriental in its decadence, and the Western Civilisation that Russia has brought with her, sweeping before her all that is rude and outworn, and in place thereof raising a city of which any country in the world might well be proud.



*Strolling Musicians.*

## CHAPTER III.

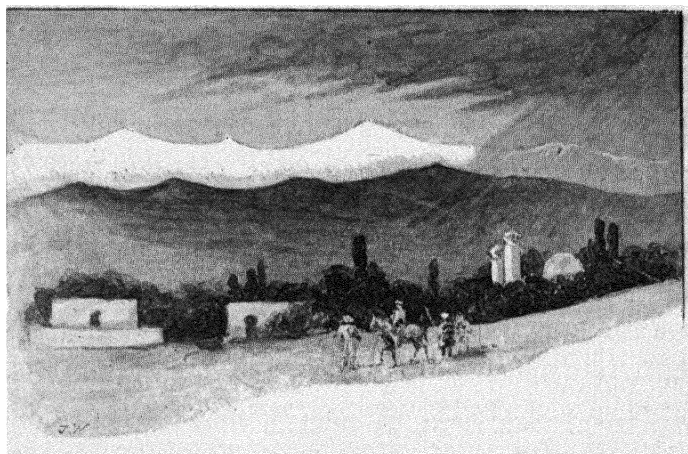
## A DRIVE ACROSS TRANSCAUCASIA.

ON a bright hot afternoon of April I left Tiflis by train for Akstafa, a small station on the Tiflis-Baku line, which forms the terminus of the great road, *vid* Erivan, to Julfa on the Persian frontier.

As one emerges from the capital of Transcaucasia one obtains a fine view of the city behind one, with its background of rugged, dark, barren hills, against which the painted houses and green iron roofs of the town stand out in brilliant patches of colour. Away below one the river Kur rushes between its high walls of rock, visible only where it leaves the town, for its banks farther up are crowded with high caravanserais and buildings which hide it entirely from view. The domes and minarets of a mosque or two add a touch of orientalism to the scene, while above them again the ruins of the

old Georgian and Persian fortresses climb along the brow of a spur of the higher hills.

The railways of Transcaucasia are comfortable, and every station of any size or importance boasts a buffet where all sorts of foods and drinks can be obtained, so that travelling is easy and pleasant enough, though the speed is by no means that



*My last view of the Caucasus.*

which we are accustomed to in Great Britain. The line after leaving Tiflis resembles in very little that by which one reaches the capital from Batum, for instead of the intricate turnings and twistings through deep valleys and magnificent scenery, one enters the wide valley of the Kur, a level plain bounded north and south by ranges of hills. Be-

yond a parallel range to the north appear every now and again glimpses of the great snow-peaks of the Caucasus, towering into the sky their heads of glistening white. The journey to Akstafa only occupies some three hours, and the time passes quickly enough, as it is here the traveller arriving from Europe obtains his first view of the Turkman and Tatar inhabitants of the steppes in their homes,—for in spring the wide valley of the Kur is dotted with the strange black circular dwellings, half rushes half tent, of these wild peoples. To him who for the first time witnesses the pastoral scenes of the steppes of Transcaucasia the novelty cannot prove anything but interesting, and in its way picturesque. The dead open level is dotted with these movable habitations, about and amongst which the women and children, gay in bright reds and blues and greens, are seen moving, while farther afield graze the flocks and herds, cattle and mares, of the community. Here and there a mounted Turkman may be espied cantering his pony from village to village, and once half-a-dozen of the tribesmen, in their blue-skirted coats and strange *papaks*, or mushroom-like hats of ragged fur, galloped for a minute or two alongside the train, shouting and laughing as they rode.

At Akstafa I alighted with my Armenian guide

and Arab servant, and while the former sought for a carriage in which to proceed on our journey towards the Persian frontier, Mohammed and I regaled ourselves with one of the national beverages of Russia, tea with slices of lemon in it, served in large tumblers—an excellent drink that I had learned to appreciate when shooting some years ago in the neighbourhood of Archangel.

Before commencing the description of my drive across Transcaucasia, a word or two must be said as to the excellent system of posts existing upon the Russian highroads, and which tend not only to facilitate travelling, but to render most comfortable those drives of hundreds of miles that have to be undertaken in parts where no railways are found.

The right of running the posts and keeping the post-horses and stations upon the various roads is let out by the Russian Government to “road companies”; but these companies are always under the immediate supervision of the local officials, and little or no complaint can as a rule be found with the management. The company binds itself to keep a certain number of horses at the different stations, and its charges are regulated by a scale drawn up by the authorities, so that extortion is practically unknown, and the traveller can estimate within a few roubles the cost of his entire journey. The charges are

levied at so much per horse per verst, no charge being made for the ordinary cost of the country; but should a carriage be preferred—and procurable—so much more per verst is charged for its use. The prices vary upon different roads, and seem always to be moderate, while the tips to drivers, who change at the stations with the horses, and to the station-masters, need be very small. At every post-house a scale of the charges is hung up, and can be referred to by the traveller, and a book is kept for complaints. I never, however, found need to refer to either, and neither my guide nor I experienced anywhere upon the long drive any difficulty or unpleasantness, with one exception, and I can testify to the civility of the servants along the entire route.

While Mohammed and I drank our tumblers of hot tea at the Akstafa station my Armenian guide was not slow in procuring our *podorojna*—or order for post-horses for the road—and a comfortable victoria with a hood, instead of the springless rattling *tarantass* of the country. The expense of taking a carriage is very little, and the comfort derived immense, for in the native carts one is bounced and bumped about until one's entire body is covered with bruises.

My scanty baggage was soon strapped on behind the carriage, the driver in his rough cloth coat with

flowing skirts on the box, and our four horses—abreast—in harness. Then with a loud crack of his whip and a shrill cry to his steeds we rattled away



*Types of the Caucasus.*

through the village that has grown up round the station.

The town of Akstafa, such as it is, lies a couple of miles or so to the south of the railway. It is a

picturesque little spot, quite oriental in appearance with its mud-houses and gardens of tall poplar-trees, its forges by the roadside, and its little yellow mosque and minarets—for the Turkman inhabitants are Moslems one and all. As we left the gardens behind us and drove on toward the mouth of the Akstafa valley, a magnificent panorama lay stretched out behind us. The heavy clouds which had been gathering during the latter part of the afternoon cleared off from the northern horizon, leaving a long line of pale turquoise sky exposed, against which, faint in the far distance, stretched a magnificent array of the snow-peaks of the Caucasus and Daghestan mountains. Between us and them lay the valley of the Kur, purple and green, for the sun which illumined the snow-peaks was hidden by the clouds from us. It lasted but a moment this marvellous contrast of light and shade, and then down came the rain, and we pulled up the hood of the carriage.

Just after dark we drew up at the station of Uzun-Talskaya, where a lamp was quickly lighted for us in a clean room, the only furniture in which was a deal table, a chair, and a couple of plank beds, with the head end slightly raised, but with, of course, no bedding. However, we were sufficiently provided with wraps and food, for many of the post-stations



have but little to offer, and so we were soon comfortable enough with a *samovar* (urn) before us, and our own good tea, that we had brought from Tiflis, on the brew. There is but little to tell about these post-stations, which, as a rule, are houses of one storey in height, containing two or three rooms, one of which a traveller can generally obtain for his own party. I had been led to suppose that all the horrors of dirt and vermin would have to be faced; but, as a matter of fact, we found very little of the former, and absolutely none of the latter, perhaps owing to the fact that the hot weather had not as yet set in.

We were off at daylight the next morning, with the same carriage, but different horses and driver, and a few miles after leaving the station had entered the valley of the Akstafa, where that stream issues from the mountains into the wide valley of the Kur.

The rain, which had been falling all night, cleared off as soon as the sun appeared on the mountain-tops, and we entered the Akstafa valley in a flood of warm light. Already there was traffic on the road, and even during the night I had heard vehicles arrive at the station, change horses, and proceed. Great lumbering waggons, often gaily painted, loaded with passengers or cotton from Erivan, almost blocked the road at places; and once we passed a victoria like our own, with four horses harnessed abreast, galloping as

fast as they could go, with the driver drunk and asleep *inside*, and the reins hanging lightly on the seat. But all the horses knew their way well enough, and they passed us, making for the right side of the road, as the custom is. We met, too, one of the mail-carts, with its guard of mounted Cossacks, bringing the post from Erivan and Persia.

The valley of the Akstafa river, until one has passed Delijan, presents to the traveller a series of scenes of the utmost beauty. Down the centre of the gorge—for such it really is—flows the river, here eddying in dark pools, here tumbling over the rocks in foamy and noise-giving cascades, but everywhere beautiful. The road, which leads principally along the right bank of the river, is at places cut almost in the face of the precipice, and at others proceeds amongst the luxuriant vegetation of the valley. Above the trees on either hand are precipices and fantastic pinnacles of rock, grown to their very edges with forests of oaks and pines, and rising above the deep green foliage like great cathedral spires. Every now and then a peep up the valley of snow-peaks appears, acquaintance with which we were to make later on. And so the road winds on, here in forest, here close to the waters of the roaring Akstafa, and here again at the very foot of the precipices, until Delijan is reached after a steep climb up the hill-

side. The road is everywhere in excellent condition and repair, and exhibits, as each new turn comes into view, some vast labour of engineering skill. Just as one enters Delijan, half hidden in the vast forest that surrounds it, with its background of snow, one catches a glimpse far below on the river's banks of the handsome barracks that the Russian Government has built here for her Cossack troops, and everywhere upon the scene soldiers could be seen, engaged in work, or sauntering and smoking in the one main street of the village. How our driver showed off his prowess and the pace of his horses as, with loud shouts and cracks of his whip, he whirled us along the village street with its neat, clean white houses and quiet respectable folk, to draw up with a jerk before the clean post-house, its windows full of flowers, and its table spread with meats and refreshments.

There is no exaggeration in what travellers have said and written regarding the scenery at and around Delijan, for anything more beautiful could scarcely be imagined. Snow-peaks, forests of oak and pine—to enumerate only two of the many varieties of trees—precipices of bare rock, pinnacles resembling the steeples of great cathedrals, are all there; with the river, far down in the valley below, winding along its boulder-strewn bed, and sending the sound

of its music up to the village above, nestling in a curve of the great mountains, so that half its main street is at almost right angles to the other half. We were leaving Georgia now, the kingdom that was merged into the Russian empire by the last sovereign of the Bagratid dynasty in 1801, when the longest line of kings in the world disappeared—for this dynasty alone had held the throne for over a thousand years. Beyond Delijan we were to enter the Armenian plateau, which extends from this spot far into Turkey in Asia, with but little to break its level save the valley of the Araxes and the great twin peaks of Mount Ararat.

With the change of district the country alters in feature; for, above Delijan, the road winds amongst forest over the Kazak-Beghi Pass, until one emerges on to the bleak mountain-tops, at this time covered in places with snow, through drifts of which we had now and again to drive. To our left lay the Karabagh country, a wilderness of dreary mountain-tops of dark rock and white snow, over which the cold biting wind of early spring blew with chill blasts.

At the summit of the pass, over 7000 feet above the sea-level, we changed horses; and the hot tumbler of tea was indeed welcome while our fresh steeds were being harnessed. Only a mile or so from the

post-station Lake Sevanga, or Gokcha, as it is often called, bursts into view; but the cloudy sky and snow-laden air added only to the depression and gloom of the barren scene. The lake, which is some forty-three miles long and twenty wide, seemed to reflect upon its dark waters the grey clouds above, from which the vast expanse of snow stood out in strange contrast. Yet, gloomy as the scene was, one could not help admiring its grandeur. Almost the only spot on which there was a sign of human life was the island, which lies near the north end, with the monastery and churches of Sevan, said to have been founded by the Armenian king Tiridates, at the time of the introduction of Christianity into his country early in the fourth century A.D., on the site of a still earlier fortress of unknown origin. One of the two churches which still exists owes its construction to the ninth century. The road above the lake is cut in the actual precipice, and is unprotected on the water-side; and, as one is whirled along in a light carriage by four horses and a ferocious Jehu, one cannot but feel that a single false step would drop one some hundreds of feet into the lake beneath; nor is one's frame of mind calmed by the driver tying his reins to the rail of his seat and turning round on the box to demonstrate with wild gesticulations how such and

such a carriage, or sledge, precipitated its whole freight of human beings—to say nothing of the horses—into the black depths below. Accidents, though by no means unknown, are happily uncommon; but I confess to feeling some relief as our road left the lake-side to cross a long promontory, dotted by the houses of Molokan exiles, that juts far out into the water.

A word or two must be said about the Molokan settlers of the Armenian plateau. It seems that a great deal too much sympathy is shown in England to the strange offshoots of religion—that in many cases take forms of insanity—amongst the Russian peasantry. There is no need to consider here the *pro* and *con* of the doctrines of these Molokans and other dissenters; suffice it to say, that they are such that those who hold them refuse to serve in the army, and often to take the necessary oaths of allegiance to the Emperor. In a country where conscription is in use no excuse can be given for the refusal of healthy men to serve their Government, and any such refusal is justly—so long as it is law—punished. Yet in England we venture to assert that because a man holds peculiar doctrines regarding religion he should be exempt from the military service which his law-abiding brethren of other creeds are obliged to undergo. So be it; yet not many years ago a certain

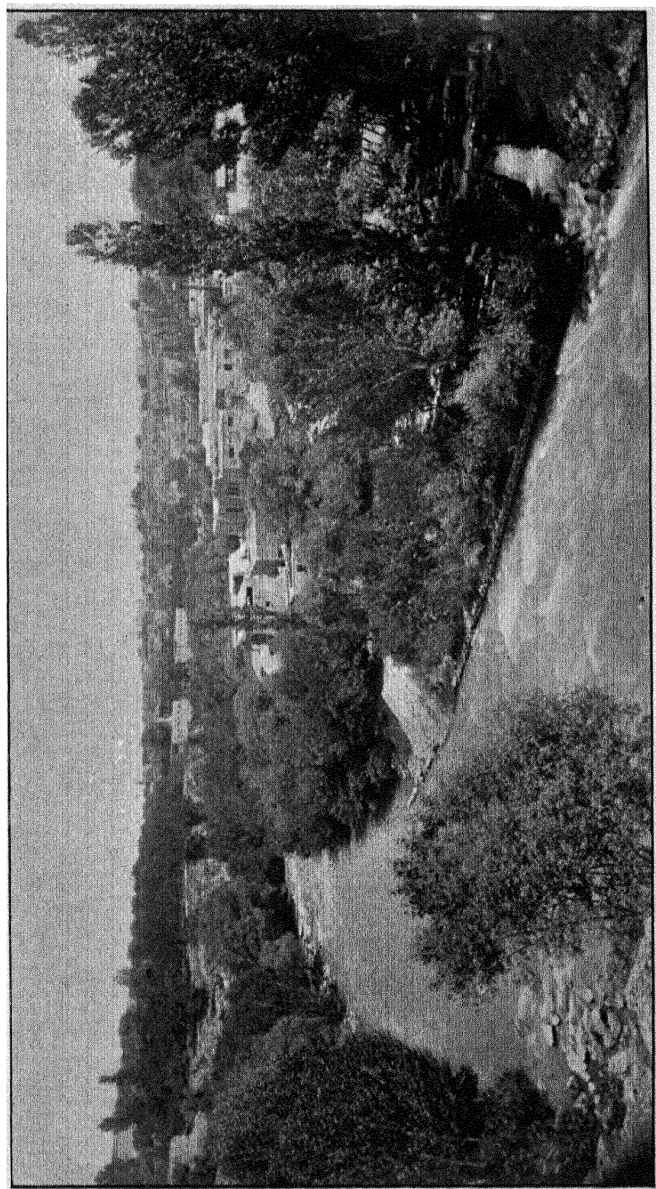
member of the House of Commons was forcibly expelled for refusing to take the oath of fealty, which every Russian soldier is expected to swear to. The fanaticism of these extraordinary Russian sects—many of the creeds are not only in variance to all laws of nature, but also horrible to even think of—can scarcely be imagined, and what in reality is a stubborn resistance to all temporal as well as spiritual laws is looked upon largely in England as martyrdom. Yet if some of the acts practised by these sectarians were committed in England, our Government would no doubt interfere as quickly as that of Russia has done.

At Elenovka, another settlement of these sectarians, we spent the night, and revelled in the delicious trout of the lake, famous all over Transcaucasia. The following day we arrived early in the afternoon at Erivan, the chief town of the province. The scenery the entire way from Elenovka was dreary and desolate in the extreme, nor did a snowstorm and biting wind tend to comfort one. Everywhere was bare rock and dreary marsh and snow-peaks, while every now and then sectarian settlements, amongst them those of the Skoptsy—about whose unnatural rites the less said the better—appear, forlorn little villages by the roadside, ill kept and foul, the houses half in ruins, and the population of a low type.

Reaching the edge of this wearying plateau, the wide plain of the Araxes, with its villages and gardens, and the town of Erivan just below us, burst into sight, a charming contrast after the long drive over the mountain-tops; and as if to enhance the scene, the sunshine burst brilliantly through the clouds. I looked long for the peaks of Ararat, but the horizon to the south did not clear, and we were destined to wait another day before the magnificent mountain unfolded itself in all its glory.

A whole book, rather than a paragraph or two, could be written on the history of Erivan; for the situation of the town on the borders of Georgia and Armenia, Persia and Russia and Turkey, has rendered it the scene of innumerable wars and innumerable sieges. The early history of Rewan, as the Persians then, and now, called it, is vague, beyond the fact that it was known as a place of some importance as early as the seventh century A.D. The town lies on the northern extremity of the wide valley of the Araxes, here some thirty miles across, in an amphitheatre of the hills, where the river Zanga, flowing from the Akdagh, falls from the mountains above. Although the steppes rise immediately to the north of the town, it lies for the greater part upon the level, its flat roofs emphasising more than ever this feature. The city—for to such a title it lays





THE RIVER ZANGA AT ERIVAN.

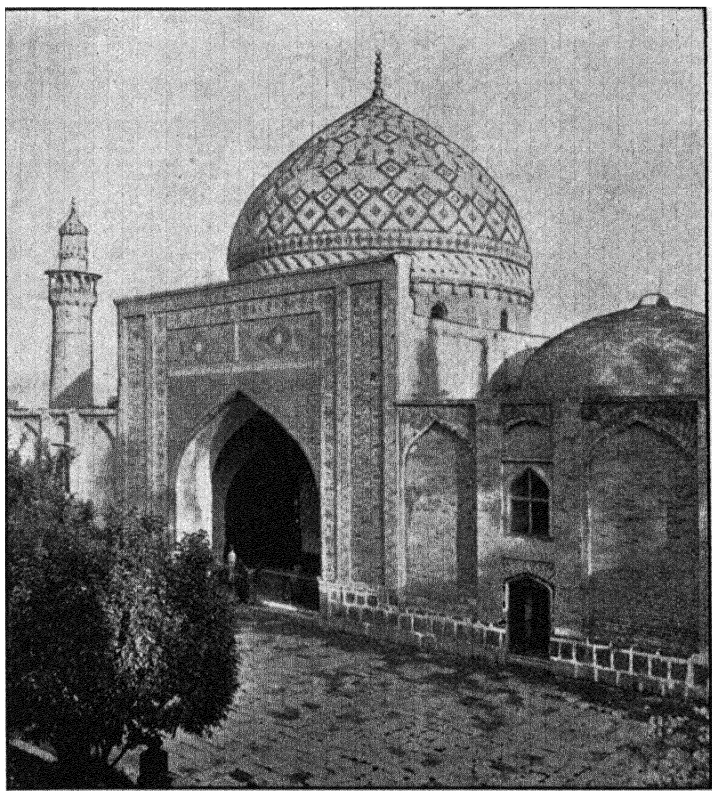


claim—contains only some 18,000 inhabitants, but extends over a large amount of ground, for the outskirts form suburbs with an orchard to every house, while even in the more central quarters many of the private dwellings possess walled gardens. If it were not for the one wide street, the public gardens, and some handsome buildings in European style, Erivan would be almost indistinguishable from the Persian towns I was to visit farther on my travels, for, with the exception of the local improvements introduced by the Russians, everything remains the same as it did when Persia held the place, and so strong was it in those days that the Russian army was cut to pieces in 1804 during its siege, nor was it until Prince Paskievitch Erivanski besieged it in 1827 that the Persians were driven out, and in the following year the treaty of Turkmanchai confirmed the Russian possession of the city, together with the entire province, which extends as far as the north bank of the Araxes.

By far the most picturesque scene in Erivan is the gorge of the Zanga, through which the river of that name rushes between walls of rock, here and there terraced for vines, and turning innumerable water-wheels upon its course. And from the bridge with its handsome arches that spans this river below the old fortress a fine view of the narrow valley is obtained

both up and down. Here the precipices have receded far enough to allow of tiny orchards with their tall straight poplar-trees and fruits in blossom, and here again the rock descends from the level of the ground above almost perpendicularly to the river's banks. Above one, a continuation of the precipice, rise the walls of the old Turkish fort, which in turn has served for a Persian palace, and to-day for a military storehouse. But the Russians have preserved one principal object of interest in the place, the reception-hall of the old Persian viceroys, with its pictures of the mythical heroes of Persia, and its stalactite walls and rich ceiling of thousands of little mirrors and carving. A deep recess, the walls and roof formed of tiny mirrors arranged in geometric designs, contains an alabaster fountain, and a raised dais from which one can gaze through a great window far down upon the Zanga below, as it rushes on its course into the open valley ; and beyond, the eye wanders away over the level country towards Ararat : but still the clouds concealed the famous peaks from view. Near this old palace is a tiled mosque of ancient date, with its arched alcove and balconies, the whole once covered with exquisite blue tiles of two shades, which to-day are sadly wanting owing to the depredations of the Armenians, who are ready at all times to injure any Mohammedan institution, provided some gain accrues

to themselves. An Armenian who accompanied me to see this mosque showed me boastingly a large bare spot from which he himself had by night re-



*Mosque of Huseyn Ali Khan at Erivan.*

moved the tiles, and afterwards sold them in Constantinople. But by far the most beautiful building and tile work in Erivan is the mosque of Huseyn Ali

Khan. This building is constructed round a large quadrangle, full of magnificent specimens of the Arband elms, under which picturesque groups of Persians and Turkis sit, drinking tea and enjoying conversation. The dome and minaret are covered with exquisite faïence in blue, and the whole facing of the principal part of the building consists of beautiful designs in various colours of the same rare material. The combinations of colours—the dull pinks, primrose yellows, and various blues—are beyond description. For the most part the design consists of scrolls of more or less mythical flowers, relieved here and there by panels of inscriptions, as a rule in white on a dark-blue ground. On all my travels I saw few scenes as beautiful and as picturesque as the great court of the mosque of Huseyn Ali. Through the tall archway that leads into the principal hall of the building one could watch the rising and falling of the pious at their prayers; and so still, so peaceful was the whole scene, that one could not help experiencing oneself the contagion of the religious feeling.

The entrance to this mosque—which, by the by, Christians are allowed to enter, contrary to the Persian custom—is off the bazaars. Unlike Tiflis, the bazaars of Erivan are essentially Persian in character, consisting of long arched and domed arcades; and though of

no great size, they offer an attractive picture with their little box-like shops full of bright carpets, silver-work, and arms. The principal trade of the place is entirely in the hands of the Armenians, of which race by far the largest part of the population consists, though many of the smaller shops are owned by Turkis of Persia.

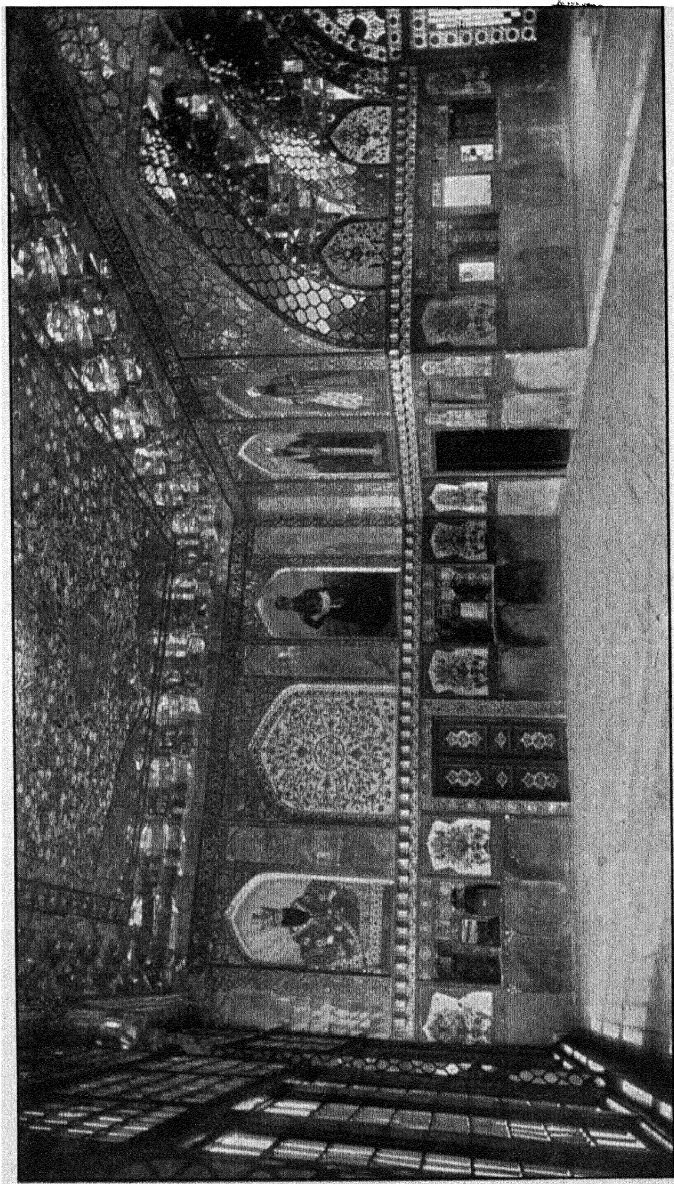
But of all the sights of Erivan the most famous is, without doubt, the great monastery of Echmiazin, the centre of the Armenian religion, and the birth-place of the Gregorian Church. True, there is nothing to be seen there that can compare in beauty with the Huseyn Ali mosque, but the history attaching to the monastery and its surroundings renders it of the greatest interest.

The road between Erivan and Echmiazin lies on the fertile plain of the Araxes valley. Now and again small villages are passed, surrounded by their walled gardens and poplar-trees, until after some twelve miles the little town, or perhaps more properly large village, of Vagharsabad, once the capital and residence of the Armenian kings, comes into sight. To-day the place shows no signs of any grandeur it may once have possessed, for the monastery itself was not built until after the kings had sought other capitals and the importance of the town had disappeared. To-day, with its dreary wide streets, there is little to be seen

but shabbiness and poverty and wine-shops, though probably the former features were largely due to the Armenian refugees who had fled from Turkish territory to take refuge at the seat of their patriarchate.

It is not the writer's purpose here to enter upon the subject of the faith and tenets of the Armenians more than to state a few brief facts as to their separation from the Churches of Greece and Rome. This disunion dates from the Council of Chalcedon, at which congress the Armenian Church was not represented. From this fact it will be understood that the principal difference of the Armenian and other Christian faiths rests in the idea of the nature of Christ, as it was mainly for the discussion of this point, and the settlement of some general doctrine touching it, that the Council of Chalcedon met. Briefly the difference is this, that the Armenian recognises in Christ and God one personality, and holds that in the crucifixion of the former the latter also suffered death. Almost this sole dogma separates the Greek and Armenian Churches, though with regard to Rome the gulf is wider; for no infallible head of the Church is recognised, nor is the Virgin Mary appealed to as a mediator. In these latter points the tenets of the Greek and Armenian Churches are at one, though in the acceptance and use of *ikons* (sacred pictures), and





ROOM IN PERSIAN PALACE, ERIVAN.



the mixing of water with the wine at communion, they fall apart again.

With these few words one may pass on to the founding of the monastery of Echmiazin, which dates from 302 A.D.—that is to say, some thirteen years after the introduction of Christianity into Armenia by St Gregory, who was anointed bishop of that country by Leontinus of Cappadocia. The tradition, still accepted, with regard to the foundation of the monastery, is as follows :—

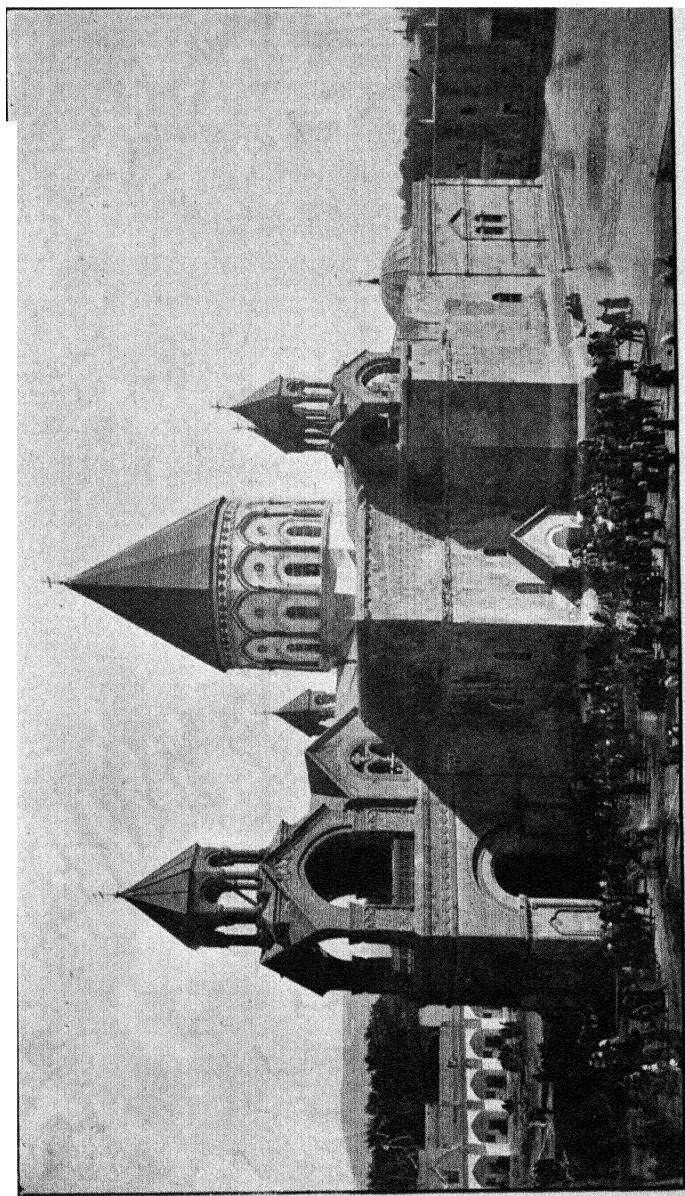
A vision appeared to St Gregory in which he perceived a figure in human form descending from heaven, in whose hand was a mallet, with which he struck the earth. From the spot arose an altar bearing fire, above which a pillar of smoke rolled, and over the smoke again appeared a luminous cross, while from the altar steps sprang a stream of water. Various other miraculous appearances followed these divine manifestations, and a voice from heaven cried, "Prostrate thyself, and at this spot build me a church, whereof these signs made manifest are a symbol." From this occurrence it was that Echmiazin owes its name, for *Ech* means "a cross," and *Miazin* "the only begotten." On the completion of the church St Gregory was installed as the first patriarch of Armenia in 303 A.D., and rather more than twenty years later the monastery sprang into existence.

From the exterior the group of sacred buildings resembles more a fortress than a religious seat of learning, and no doubt during the many wars that have been waged in the wide valley of the Araxes its fortifications have stood it in good stead. A high wall flanked with towers surrounds the more ancient portion of the building, though the lately added schools stand in open ground. Entering by a large gateway, one finds oneself in a great paved square surrounded on all sides by buildings. These for the most part much resemble one another, and consist mainly of whitewashed rooms opening out on to a wide verandah, while below are further suites of rooms for the residence and offices of the monks. One side of the square is almost completely occupied by the dwelling of the Catholicos, or Patriarch, the elected head of the Gregorian Church, of whom more anon. In the centre of the square stands the cathedral, a strange conglomeration of the architecture of many periods. By far the finest portion is the tower of red porphyry at the west end, beneath which is an entrance to the building. This tower is covered with rich ornament in sculptured stone, and is exceedingly handsome both in design and colour. It dates from the middle of the seventeenth century, though portions of the present church are said to have been erected in A.D. 618. Two smaller towers, bearing

the low pointed steeples so common to Armenian churches, stand at the ends of the transept wings. For the rest the exterior of the cathedral bears little pretence to beauty, the restorations in debased Armenian and Russian style detracting not a little from the appearance of the whole. Nor within does it present any particular charm, for the interior is not only dull and gloomy but dirty as well, and a thick coating of dust lies over the rich but coarse decoration with which the walls and dome are covered. Under this dome, in the centre of the church, stands a gaudy altar, marking the spot where the vision appeared to St Gregory, and on either side, against the heavy pillars, are the two thrones of the Catholics, one of richly carved walnut-wood presented by Pope Innocent XI. in the seventeenth century, and the other an offering from the Armenians of Smyrna about the year 1720. The latter with its rich inlaid mother-of-pearl and tortoise-shell is very handsome, but is being allowed to fall into decay simply for the lack of a glue-pot and five minutes' work. The same absence of care is noticeable on every side, and even the high altar is dust-laden, and wears the appearance of being seldom, if ever, attended to. On the north side of this altar a door gives access from the main portion of the church into the sacristy, in which the relics are exhibited. In spite of all that one hears from the

Armenians of Transcaucasia regarding the variety and value of this collection of religious and other curiosities, there is by no means a great deal to be seen. Certainly the finest and rarest articles appear to be the magnificent embroideries which cover the vestments of former Patriarchs, and some of these are truly splendid. But it is not upon them that the priests set great store, for they were continually calling the writer's attention to the jewelled orders and decorations which Czar, Sultan, and Shah have bestowed upon former heads of the Gregorian Church. These lie in glass tables together with some handsome jewelled crosses of the former Patriarchs. A rough gold circlet was pointed out to me as that with which the early kings of Armenia were crowned; while in a silver box, securely fastened, reposes the hand of St Gregory himself, and with it the blessing is bestowed in the enthroning service of a new Catholicos.

From visiting the church the traveller is next taken to see the printing-press, where a large number of books, and the national and official paper, 'Ararat,' are published and printed. Lately engraving has been introduced with very commendable results. Near by is the school, a large building arranged upon modern and sanitary principles, and a word of sincere praise must be given to those who are responsible for this excellent institution. Here



THE CATHEDRAL AT ECHMIADZIN.





priests and scholars, who speak fluently many of the languages of Western Europe, will be met, and the traveller cannot fail to be struck by the excellent education given to the boys, as well as by the attention paid to their health, the dormitories being such as would not by any means disgrace an English public school. An open-air gymnasium stands in the grounds, and is highly appreciated. A good mercantile, classical, and foreign education is given to the boys, who benefit thereby enormously in their future life, and find no difficulty in surpassing the less hard-working and less carefully taught Russian in whatever branch of life they take up. Not far from the schools is a large reservoir, ensuring a limitless supply of water to the monastery, and of great value in irrigating the surrounding gardens and vineyards, for the monks are by no means teetotallers.

The famous library, situated in that portion of the monastery which forms the residence of the Catholicos, contains many works of extreme antiquity, and a few of rarity and beauty, but space does not allow of any description here of the revered and much prized manuscripts.

Nothing is neglected by the monks to render agreeable and pleasant and interesting a visit by stray travellers to this out-of-the-way spot. Food and wine are supplied in plenty, and everybody con-

cerned with the institution seems desirous of leaving a good impression. The chief Catholicos, Megerdich Khrimian, was unfortunately absent in St Petersburg at the time of the writer's visit to Echmiazin, but his place as host was taken by the third Catholicos, an archbishop himself; and under his guidance, and that of another Church dignitary, every facility was given for sight-seeing, and visiting the various places and works of interest.

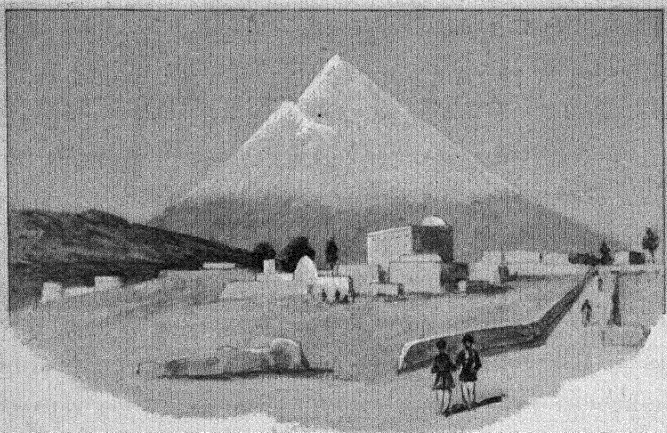
A few words must be said as to the Synod of the Gregorian Church and the election of its chief, as this matter cannot fail to be of interest as throwing light upon the relations of the Russian Government and the Church of the Armenians. The deed regulating the status of this Church was signed by the Emperor Nicholas I. in 1836. The document states clearly the position of things, and its perusal removes, in this case at least, the common accusation of want of toleration in Russia. Freedom of public worship is allowed; the clergy are exempt from military and other service of the State; and the spiritual position of the Catholicos is recognised. The deed further specifies the manner of Synod by which the affairs of the Church shall be regulated, the right of presiding being vested in the Catholicos. The members of the Synod are elected by the Armenians and confirmed in their position by the Czar, but it is said that in

no case has any Czar ever objected to the choice of the people. In all civil questions the Russian Minister of the Interior must be consulted, and an agent of the Government resides at Echmiazin, through whom these communications take place.

With regard to the election of the Catholicos himself. On the decease of a Patriarch letters are sent to the Armenian dioceses all over the world, calling upon them to send delegates on a certain date to Echmiazin to select the new Patriarch. Four names are selected by this general assembly of representatives of the people, and of these again two are chosen. The two candidates are then named to the Czar, and he has the power of nominating which of the two he pleases, though as a matter of fact it has always been the custom for the Emperor to name the one who has received the larger number of votes. From this it will be seen that although the Czar is nominally at the head of the Gregorian Church, he uses his prerogatives merely in confirming the choice of the Armenians themselves. The sole disadvantage under which Armenians exist in Russia is that the children of a mixed marriage must be educated in the Orthodox faith, and this holds good to all sectarians.

It was on my return drive from Echmiazin to Erivan that, the clouds lifting, I obtained my first view of the great snow-peaks of Ararat, some five-

and-twenty miles away, towering in pure snowy whiteness above a dark bank of cloud, with a pale turquoise sky beyond. One ceases then to wonder that in early days the mountain was held as sacred, or that the Armenians chose it as the centre of their world, building their capitals in the plains at its



*Armenian Village and Mount Ararat—view between Erivan and Nakchivan.*

foot, and weaving around its peaks of snow a thousand traditions and stories.

It was dusk when we drove across the bridge over the Zanga and entered Erivan again.

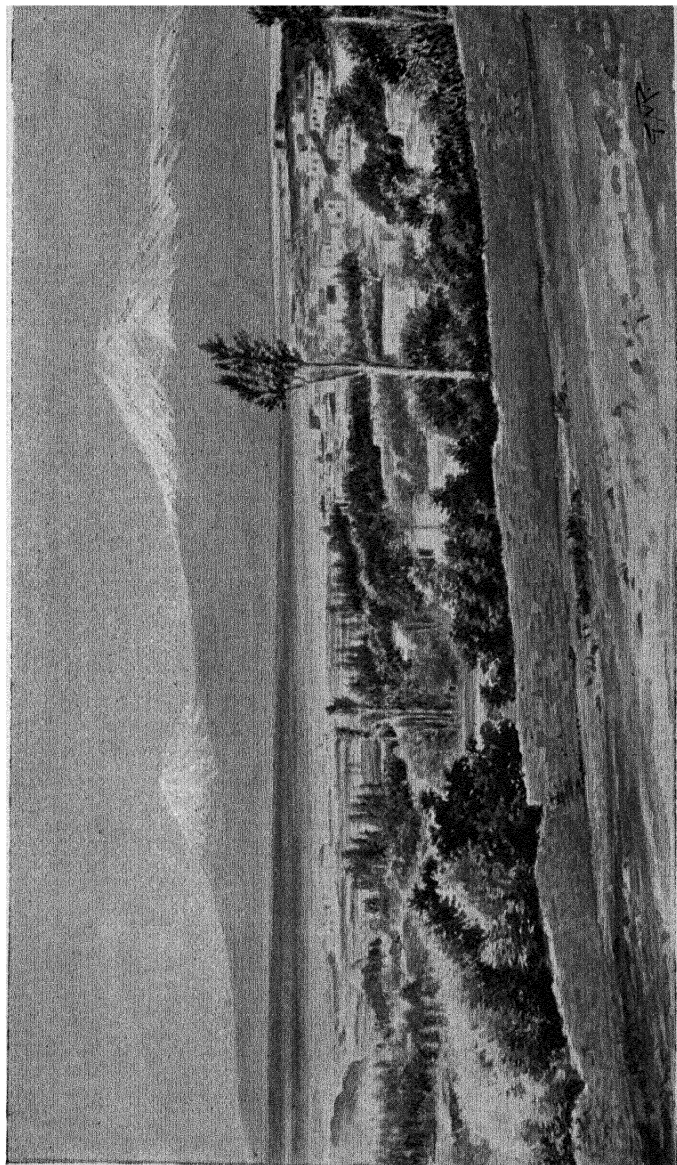
Of the journey from Erivan to Nakchivan—or Nakchichevan, as it is more properly spelled—there is not very much to tell. The road proceeds for the entire distance—nearly 150 miles—along the valley

of the Araxes, of which river, however, it is only occasionally that a glimpse is obtained. During the entire journey, which occupied me some two days and a half—for I did not hurry over the drive—the wonderful double peaks of Ararat were in full view, and, as one proceeds to the east, the cone-shaped peak of the lower, with the dome of the higher behind it, form as impressive a view of mountain as could be seen anywhere. The road is excellent, and, being of such vast strategical importance to Russia, is continually kept in good condition, so that the drive, more especially in a victoria with springs, is such that it cannot fail to please even the most particular of travellers. No doubt luck favoured me, for the weather was fine, and the constant passing of men upon the road armed with picks and shovels showed clearly enough that the spring repairs had just been completed.

It was between Erivan and Nakchivan that the only mishap that befell me in Russian territory occurred ; and to many the experience might have proved of more serious discomfort than it did to me, for my entire luggage, save one small bag, was, during the only snowstorm we experienced, cut off the back of my carriage near Bash Nurashin, a large station and a depot of the police upon the road. This manner of theft is not uncommon in Trans-

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caucasia, and so skilful are the thieves that they are able to cut the ropes and set the baggage adrift without detection. The one necessary they require is that the hood of the carriage should be up, so that there is no possibility of being seen. I returned at once to Bash Nurashin and made a statement to the police, who examined the carriage, and were satisfied that the ropes had been cut by robbers, and promised to do all in their power to recover my property. Needless to say, I have never seen any of it since, nor have the letters written by H.B.M. Consul at Batum or directly by myself, asking whether there was any news of my lost property, been answered. I am doubly sorry for this mishap, as otherwise on my travels in Russia I have never met with any unpleasant experience, but always received the utmost civility and assistance from the officials, and had hoped to leave the country without one single disagreeable circumstance to upset my opinion. The theft, it is true, was perhaps unpreventable, though a Cossack guard ought, I heard afterwards, to have been given me; but the utter silence on the part of the police authorities, who have not even the civility to answer the official correspondence of a British consul, is less easily comprehended. So, bereft of all my belongings save a change of shirts and socks, my brushes and combs, and, fortunately,



VIEW OF ERIVAN AND MOUNT ARARAT.



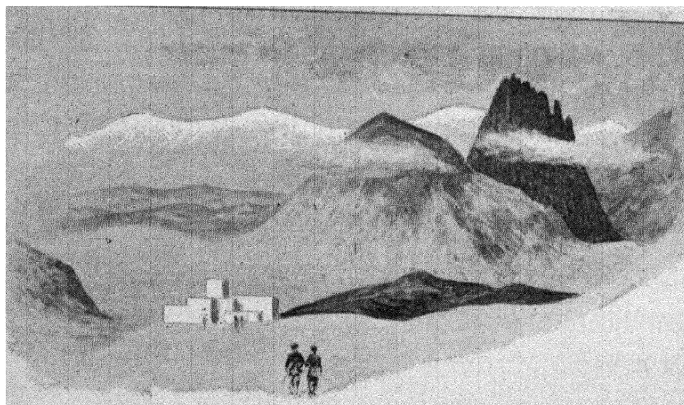


my passport and money, I continued my journey a somewhat sadder but also a wiser man. Fortunately I lost little of any value, the entire stock stolen consisting of clothes, linen, and bedding.

Of Nakchivan a few words must be said, for the town, small and unimportant as it is, is said by tradition to be the oldest in Armenia, and to have been founded by Noah himself after abandoning the ark on the summit of Ararat; and here his grave is still shown. More historical, certainly, is the Median settlement at this spot after Cyrus had successfully routed them. Since then it has changed hands in the scramble of nations for these rich plains, besides forming at one time an independent State; and was finally ceded to Russia, with the province of Erivan, by the treaty of Turkman Chai in 1828. The sole building of any pretensions to size or interest that I saw is the modern mosque, around which are the bazaars—the better class shops principally owned by Armenians, and the poorer by Persian Turkis. There are some public gardens on a slight hill to the north-west of the town, but dreary and ill kept. In fact, the whole place, with its streets ankle-deep in mud, presented an inhospitable and gloomy appearance.

Nakchivan was the last town I was destined to visit in Russian territory, for a drive of some six-and-twenty miles the following day, for the most

part through wild rock-strewn and barren country, brought me to Julfa, the frontier post, on the Araxes river. There is little there besides the post-station and the large custom-house, where my passport was soon viséd, and whence, after coffee and a cigarette with a charming and polite official, I was rowed across into Persian territory.



*Our last peep of Russian Territory.*

## CHAPTER IV.

## JULFA TO TABRIZ.

THE boat in which I crossed from Russian into Persian territory bore many passengers besides myself, for quite a number of Turkis, inhabitants of the province of Azerbaijan, returning from trade in Russia, shared the craft. Their exit from the territory of the Czar was carefully watched, and their passports and passes examined. A rough lot they were to look at, but polite enough in manner, though this I believe to have been more owing to the civil attention that was being paid to my comforts by an official or two, than to their own natural inclinations. The passage is quickly over, for even in the rough boats in use it occupies only some ten minutes or so, and the stream runs fast and helps not a little to carry one to the other shore.

From the river-bed the scene around was a curious one. To the north the Russian custom-house stood

out clean and white against the dreary background of barren rocky mountains; while to the south the ground sloped up, a desert, from the river's bed to hills equally barren and desolate beyond. On the Persian bank are a few buildings, tumble-down and in bad repair, forming a contrast to the none too handsome or luxurious habitations on the Russian side. A house, bearing a painted Lion and Sun, the arms of Persia, is the most imposing building, behind which is an enclosed yard and the office of the Indo-European telegraph station, while across the road, if such it can be called, stands a caravanserai and some stables and shops, but wretched and squalid to a degree. But few people were to be seen on the Persian bank. Half-a-dozen or so men awaited the arrival of our boat, with horses to hire for the continuation of the journey to Tabriz, the capital of the province, and the largest city in Persia, some eighty miles distant.

My Armenian interpreter had not been permitted to cross the river, with the result that Mohammed and I found ourselves amongst this little group of yelling Turkis, without being able to comprehend a word of what they were shouting, and altogether in a sorry plight. A pretence at examining our baggage was rendered speedy by the bestowal of a minute sum of money, and shouldering our scanty traps

—all that remained after the theft at Bash Nurashin, with what we had been able to replace at Nakchivan—we proceeded to the telegraph office, where our eyes were gladdened by the sight of a European, a native of some outlandish Russian frontier province, who spoke a jargon of Russian and German. However, despite his language, he and his wife made themselves most agreeable and put me up for the night.

Of all the dismal spots that I ever saw Julfa is the worst, a few mud-houses in a howling wilderness, surrounded on three sides by mountains absolutely devoid of vegetation, and on the fourth by the Araxes, the banks of which presented here and there the only appearance of verdure in the scene, and that only stunted and dried-up leafless shrubs, that looked as though they hugged the earth in very shame at their disreputable condition. Life at this inhospitable spot must indeed be burdensome. Any oriental town is bearable that I have ever visited, but here not only is there a lack of vegetation, but even of fellow-creatures, for it would take much to make one interest oneself in the few dirty caravan-men or dirtier custom officials who form the small population of the place. Add to this a climate in which the mercury freezes in winter and almost boils in summer, cut off from all the world except for the

long line of iron posts with their wire burdens that seem but a mockery of civilisation. Even the few little plants that the good wife of the telegraph clerk was trying to grow in pots seemed faded and weary of life.

Thanks to the assistance of my host, a couple of horses were hired for the journey to Tabriz, with the owner to accompany us on foot,—for I preferred to travel in this manner, and take longer over the journey, rather than by the usual mode of *chapar*, or posts, by which considerably more speed can be obtained, as the horses are changed at stations along the road. Though the *chapar* offered, it is true, a more tempting manner of travel, I felt that on this journey of eighty miles I could, by hiring my horses, gain much experience that would prove of service to me eventually in the longer journey that lay before me in Persia. And so it was; for in spite of the fact that our Turki *chapadar*, as these hirers of caravan animals are called, spoke no known tongue, we obtained not a little insight into the ways of Persian inns and the peasantry upon our ride of two days and a half that proved useful in times to come.

As to our steeds, the less said the better. Suffice it to mention that they were so bad that both Mohammed and I preferred to walk nearly the entire distance, while our Turki, who was ill, was glad

of the chance of a lift now and again. He was a cheery, amusing little man on the whole, but appeared to feel himself much more lonely with Mohammed and myself than we did as strangers in his country. His horses were, I think, the worst I ever saw at starting, but seemed to warm up to their work as they went along. Poor fellow, our ironical compliments on his steeds, though not understood, seemed quite to upset him, and at one spot he burst into tears; so we ceased our chaff, and were relieved to find his gay and jovial nature getting the better of him again, until he broke forth into the most unmelodious song that ever mortal ears listened to.

We were off about sunrise, the usual delays having prevented an earlier start, as we had intended. The road was at first as unattractive as anything could well be, a dreary stony plain. Once crossed, we entered an almost stonier valley, with a few signs of vegetation, up which we proceeded for some time, to emerge upon a plateau beyond. In the valley, where were a mud-house or two, we came across a picturesque group of natives drinking their morning tea. It is often the case that a traveller brings away with him his first experience of a new country as one of his most striking reminiscences, whereas the incident may be one that recurred again and

again on his further journey. And so it is in this case; for in calling to mind the many and varied experiences of Persia, this first glimpse of native life flashes across me. The rocky valley, shut in with hills on either hand, opened out to the plain of Julfa, far away across the barren stretch of which I could see the banks of the Araxes, and the buildings of the Persian and Russian custom-houses. Beyond these again rose the fantastic rocky peaks of the high mountains in Russian territory. In relief to this scene of monotonous colour was the group in the foreground—gaily dressed men and children seated on a patch of emerald green grass, near a spring, while around them grazed their horses, many richly caparisoned. A few carpets of brilliant hue lay strewn upon the grass, and on these reclined the chief men of the party, who had thrown off their black coats and donned a lighter garb of coloured cloth. In front of them on a tray was the *samovar* with its china teapot stewing on the top of the chimney, and the usual collection of small glass tumblers in china saucers. A fire, from which the blue smoke curled into the bluer sky, had been lighted near by, and over it savoury meats were cooking. But there the attraction of the picture ended, for there was no kind word of welcome, no invitation to drink a cup of tea, no



“Good-day” even, only the scowling look that the Turki of Northern Persia loves to shed upon the European. One’s only consolation—and it *is* a consolation—is to smile to oneself and think what that scowl will cost them when Russia steps across her frontier and treats them as they deserve to be treated, for of all the miserable curs that nature has put upon the face of the earth commend me to the townsman of Northern Persia.

On the plateau at the end of the valley stand the ruins of a large caravanserai, the gateway of which, with its blue faïence, is very fine. The place is entirely deserted now, and bears a most desolate appearance, standing alone in the plain, with little to relieve the monotony of the scene except barren mountaintops. Toward sunset we crossed a watershed and descended to a wide valley, richly cultivated and green with rising corn. It was dark when we reached our resting-place at the farther side of this valley, and entered the groves of trees that surround the little town of Marand. But our guide knew his way well enough, and led us now along a muddy path, now in the bed of a fast-flowing stream, but always under the branches of tall trees. We groped our way along in the darkness, now and then catching a glimpse of a light in the paper windows of the houses on our right and left, until, turning suddenly, we found our-

selves in a narrow street, with little shops and caravanserais alternating with one another. We avoided the larger inns, our Turki leading us to the door of a house of a friend of his, where we sought our quarters for the night. It was my first experience of Persian lodgings, and a few words of description may therefore be excused. A deep archway led us into a square yard, on one side of which ran an arcade serving as stables, the mangers being large holes in the wall. The flat roof of this arcade was supported on rough pillars. Opposite the archway by which one gained entrance to the place was a high wall, over the top of which the trees of the neighbour's garden appeared. The remaining two sides of the yard were occupied by the house, built entirely of mud, and, like all buildings in this part of the world, in an execrable state of repair. A flight of outside steps led one to the two best rooms of the house, opening out of one another, both large and airy, the entire ends being occupied with the large windows that the Persians love so much, and which are so unsuitable to their winter climate. These windows in this case, as generally throughout the country, bore some pretensions to artistic merit, being formed of small pieces of wood arranged in geometrical patterns of intricate design. Paper, as usual, took the place of glass. The remaining part of the house was occupied by the owner and

his family, which seemed innumerable. Fowls, cats, and dogs perambulated the place on all sides; but even though this was Persia, the cats resembled those of the back-slums of London. It never struck me, though once or twice I made inquiries, until I arrived in London and passed a bird-fancier's in the Brompton Road, where were Persian cats for sale, that they were the only specimens I had seen since starting on my travels. The truth is, Persian cats are bred in Ispahan and Shiraz, and are brought down to Bushire for shipment at the season of the exportation of horses. At other times it is very rare to see them out of the particular districts in which their breeding is made a matter of profit or pleasure.

We were able to raise a decent supper at Marand, followed by innumerable small cups of sweetened tea from a neighbouring *café*. In spite of the bad horses, we had completed just upon forty miles since leaving Julfa.

At daylight the following day we were off, and emerging from the gardens of the town, commenced a steep ascent of the hills that lie behind it. And here the rain caught us, drenching us to the skin, and rendering walking in the mud and wet most difficult and disagreeable. Nor did things improve, for as we ascended to the summit of the pass the rain changed to snow, of which a considerable quantity already lay

upon the road. However, once across, the sun reasserted his authority, the clouds cleared off, and the road became better. We had now crossed the watersheds of the rivers that flow into the Caspian, and those that drain into Lake Urmiah, of which large body of water I shall have more to say anon.

We reached our next stage early in the afternoon, and found tolerably comfortable quarters in one of the two or three small caravanserais that exist at Sofian. The place is only a small village, merely existing for the convenience of a post-station, though a few peasants cultivate the rich plain on the edge of which the village stands. Behind it rise the barren mountains, along the foot of which, on their southern side, the road proceeds as far as Tabriz, while on the right lies the great plain of the Aji-chai, extending to the northern banks of Lake Urmiah on the south, to Tabriz on the east, and as far as the Kurdish mountains on the west.

We spent the night at Sofian, and the following day reached Tabriz in safety. There is but little to see upon the road, except the ever-passing caravans, with camels and their strange drivers, and mules and pack-horses, until faintly at first, lying in an amphitheatre of the hills, Tabriz appears, a dull haze of flat roofs and poplar-trees, with the old fortress or "Ark" standing out high above the house-tops.

Before entering upon the description of Tabriz, it may not be out of place to make a few general remarks about the province of Persia through which the road from Julfa to that city passes, and of which Tabriz itself is the capital. From a geographical point of view this north-west corner of Persia belongs rather to the system of mountain-ranges and elevated plateaux that form so distinct a feature in what is known as Turkish Armenia and the Russian province of Transcaucasia. The country to the north of Tabriz and of Lake Urmiah consists of parallel ranges of mountains split up into deep ravines, and here and there wide fertile valleys, the whole gradually sloping away to the great plain which surrounds the northern, and practically the eastern, side of the above-mentioned lake. The general direction that these mountains take is north-east and south-west, so that their ridges have more than once to be crossed by the traveller between Julfa and Tabriz. It is almost impossible to obtain any correct estimate of the size or population of the province of Azerbaijan, for its boundaries are uncertain, owing not a little to the fact that in oriental countries it is a common occurrence for the sovereign to tack a portion of a province on to the next district, in order to increase the territory of some governor, and diminish that of another less popular one. But Mr Curzon, whose book is cer-

tainly the highest authority upon all matters relating to Persia, estimates the extent of Azerbaijan at about 40,000 square miles, with a population of 2,000,000 people, including the following :—

Turkis . . . . .	470,000
Kurds . . . . .	450,000
Nestorians . . . . .	44,000
Armenians . . . . .	28,000

However, though this is probably the most correct estimate to be found, it is impossible to place absolute reliance on the figures, as a large portion of Kurdistan has never been travelled over, much less the population counted. Personally, from my experiences in Persian Kurdistan, I venture to think the number of the Kurds given above as excessive; for during my journey through their lands I found the country very much more thinly populated than was generally supposed, and not by any means in the same ratio as on the rich plains of Lahijan and in the district of Solduz, where the Kurds are more thickly settled; for near Serdasht and in the entire length of the Kalu valley the mountains are covered with forest, and the villages comparatively few and far between.

With these few general facts as to the province through which the road from Julfa lies, and of which I was to see more on my further travels, I can revert to my personal experiences.

Near the city one crosses a fine brick bridge of many arches, which spans the Aji-chai, and enters immediately amongst the walled gardens which surround the town. Then on along a wide dusty road, with orchards first, and afterwards houses, on both sides. Then again amongst caravanserais and shops, in and out, here, there, and everywhere, until the gaping arches of the gloomy bazaars open out in front, and one passes from the bright sunlight into the dusk, to emerge, after wondering at the many sights that meet the eyes, in the quarter called Arministan, where are the residences of the Europeans. And there at the British Consulate-General I met my old friends Mr and Mrs Cecil Wood, and was received with all the kindness and hospitality which none know better how to bestow than our able Consul-General and his charming wife.

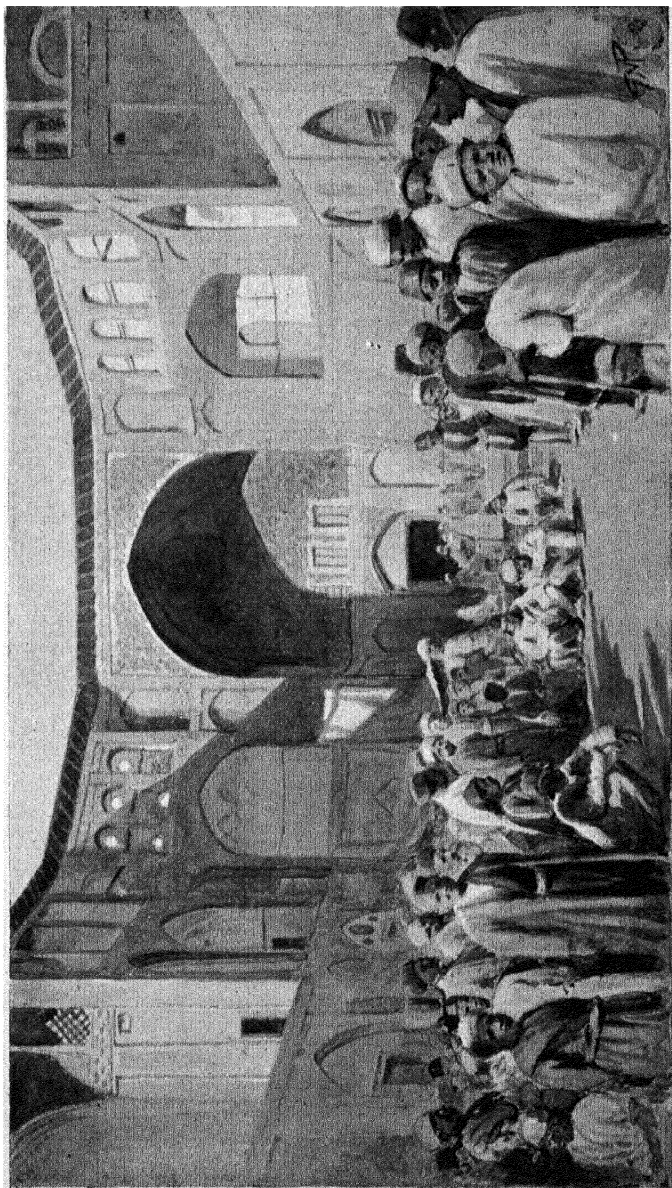
## CHAPTER V.

## TABRIZ.

TABRIZ, which is the capital of the large province of Azerbaijan, is the first commercial city of Persia, and boasts a population of close upon 200,000 inhabitants. But few Persians are to be found within its walls, and it may be said to be a Turki city. Though no doubt the inhabitants of Azerbaijan come of a finer and hardier race than the Persians, the city-people seem to have sunk even to a lower grade, and no race can compare with the mean, low, and fanatical standard of the Tabrizis.

More even than most oriental cities has the fate of Tabriz been a checkered one ; for not only does nature seem to be bent upon its destruction by periodical earthquakes of most severe nature, but man also has done much towards her destruction upon more than one occasion. The town does not to-day stand upon the site that the original city held, for a few miles





IN THE BAZAARS, TABRIZ.



away to the south can be seen the extensive ruins of a large settlement, which it is now almost universally agreed formed the earlier city. But whether the enterprising Zobeida, the wife of Harun Er-Rashid, founded the town that at present stands is a matter of conjecture. Such, however, seems to be the probability, that finding the original site unsuited to the magnificent ideas that this good lady seems to have shared with her husband, she laid the foundations of a new and larger city a few miles to the north of the place existing at that time (791 A.D.) The object of this change of site is easily comprehended; for whereas the river flows through the present town, the water-supply of the earlier had to be brought in small and inconvenient conduits. But long before either Harun Er-Rashid or Zobeida visited this portion of their vast domains there was standing an already famous city of the same name, the classical Tauris, which as early as the third century A.D. was the capital of the Armenian kings. But without referring to times which in these oriental countries are somewhat mythical, it is easy to see how badly Tabriz has fared since the date of Zobeida's founding of the second city; for following the Arab domination under the Abbaside caliphs, there came the invading hosts of Seljuks, Turks, Persians, and in still later years the Russians (1828), and during this period of eleven

hundred years we have certain information of its total destruction by earthquake on no less than seven occasions. One wonders at the perseverance of a race that, no sooner than it was destroyed, commenced once more to rebuild it; and to-day the city, if it presents little or no feature of beauty or wealth, must at least attract the attention of the traveller to its commercial vitality and its great size.

The town lies at the end of a valley which opens out in a triangular form, the base being the great plain of the Aji-chai, which extends as far as the shores of Lake Urmiah, some forty miles distant. The Aji river, from which the plain takes its name, flows from the valley through the centre of the town, emerging on to the level country, and forming a source of water-supply for the surrounding fields, and thus rendering this great flat expanse a most fertile and profitable granary.

In appearance the situation of the town is picturesque. It lies, a bewildering yellow collection of low flat-roofed houses, in the centre of the wide valley, surrounded by orchards and gardens, from which the barren rocky hills rise to the north and south, devoid of all vegetation, and red and yellow in colour. There are but few minarets or elevated buildings to vary the level appearance of the house-tops, and of what there are I shall have opportunity of speaking anon.

The town is walled, but in some spots streets lead directly out into the open country and the suburbs, without the gateways, which were once of great importance, being used. There are, however, still seven principal entrances to the town, and recently, at the desire of H.B.M. Consul-General, Mr Cecil Wood, another has been opened in the Christian quarter—called Arministan—in order that such Europeans as possess carriages can drive straight into the country without the necessity of passing through the narrow and crooked streets and bazaars—by no means an easy or safe proceeding.

A few remarks upon the commerce and trade of the place may here be made before continuing the narrative of my experiences.

The reason of the commercial importance of Tabriz to-day is the fact that, the duties on goods crossing Russian territory being so exorbitant, all the trade of Northern Persia, with the exception of a very small quantity of Russian manufactured goods, arrives in the country by caravan from Trebizond, a port of Asia Minor near the eastern end of the Black Sea. The revenue of the province of Azerbaijan, of which Tabriz is the capital, amounts to £250,000, and thus represents a quarter of the income of the whole of Iran. But important as is this sum, H.B.M. Consul-General, in his last report (1894), has to call the at-

tention of the Government to a large falling off in the trade. This he puts down to several reasons, the principal of which are as follows :—

(1.) The fact that Tehran is supplied more cheaply *via* the Caspian with Russian goods.

(2.) That the caravan hire into Central Persia from the south is much cheaper than through Turkish territory.

(3.) The low exchange upon silver, which in a single year (1893 to 1894) fell 30 per cent.

It is unnecessary in a book dealing of travel as this does to enter fully into the commerce or other statistics of Tabriz, but some idea of the difficulty of the trade can be imagined when, added to the utter rottenness of the local government, it is taken into consideration that all imports coming from Trebizond have to be carried by caravan a distance which takes thirty-two days in winter and often seventy in summer to accomplish. These united causes show the following unsatisfactory result, that between the years 1893 and 1894 there was a falling off of £441,500 in the imports, and of £189,834 in the exports. These few remarks will suffice to give the reader some idea of the difficulties and uncertainties of trade in such far-removed portions of the world as the north-west corner of Persia.

A word or two must be said as to the government

of Azerbaijan and Tabriz. The capital of the province forms to-day, as has been the custom formerly, the residence of the Vali-Aht, or heir-apparent to the throne of Persia. In no way can one see that any advantage can accrue from this customary banishment of the successor to the Shah's throne from Tehran, to a spot where he is unable to obtain reliable information as to political events, and when called upon to fill his father's place, he must necessarily be in great ignorance as to what has been passing, and in what state the affairs of his country are. But no doubt the astute Shah has reason for keeping the successor he has nominated to fill his throne after him absent from his neighbourhood. The present Vali-Aht is a man of delicate health and weak temperament, taking little or no interest in the affairs of the province of which he is nominally governor, living in a manner too slovenly for even a low-class European, and incapable of making up his mind when one of the constantly occurring crises occur. Europeans who know him well compare his character most unfavourably with that of the Shah, who at all events is a man of energy and pride. The very state of repair, or rather disrepair, in which his Highness's palaces of cheap wood and inferior stucco are, shows that he must lack even the capability of looking after his private affairs, let alone the affairs of State. In fact, during my visit

to Tabriz there can be said to have existed practically no government of any sort, and were it not that the population is largely engaged in commerce, the success of which necessitates peace, the mob might have gone to any excess without the lifting of a hand to keep order and protect life. The ill-paved roads, even those on which the heir-apparent has to drive to reach his own tumble-down house in the suburbs, are a disgrace to the place, but require only a few workmen turned out for a few days to put everything in order; but what between the meanness of the authorities and their utter *nonchalance*, no attempt is made. It is evidently the aim of some writers, by making much of the few good points—and they are few indeed—to be found in the Government and people of Persia, to aid our political aims in that country; but it scarcely strikes one that all the awful corruption, cruelty, immorality, and oppression need be glossed over in the manner in which it sometimes is. Personally my experiences and what I saw in Persia were sufficient for the following statement, that it surpasses, for a low standard of government, officialdom, and cruelty of every sort, any country into which it has been my lot to travel. Philanthropists and politicians are apt to revert, whenever it suits their purpose to do so, to Morocco, Turkey, and China; but the fact that it is considered expedient

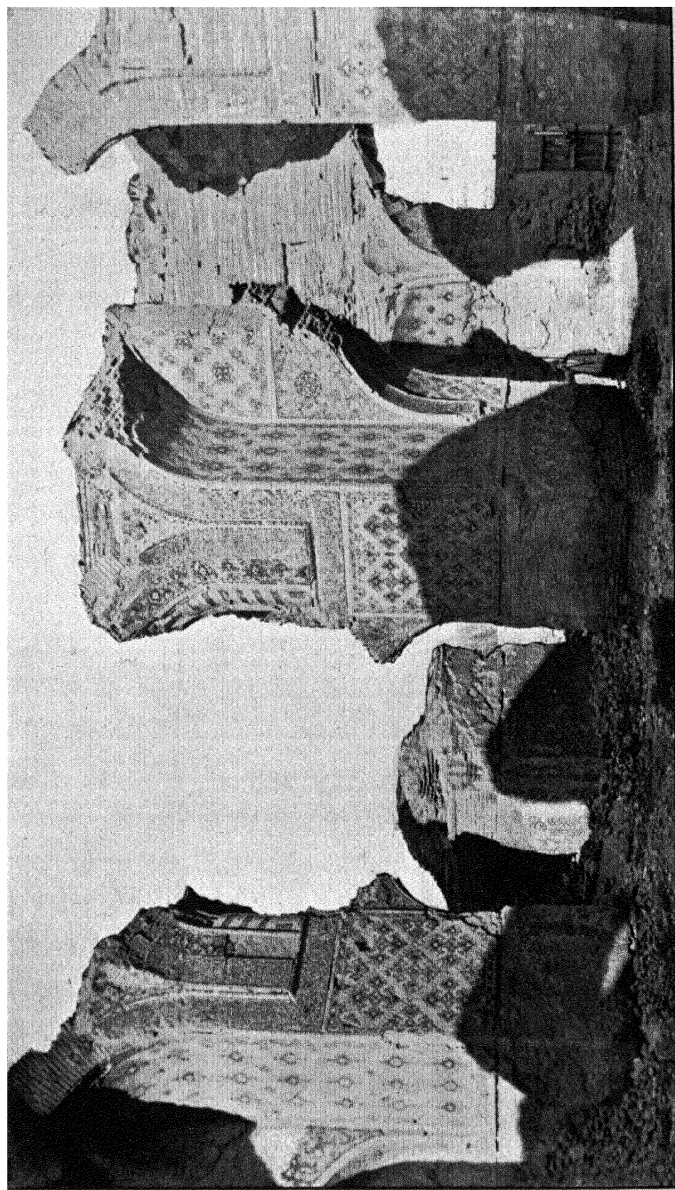


that Persia should remain our ally, allows all its rottenness and horrors to be overlooked and disregarded. Point out another country in the world where like poverty, poverty due to the unutterably rotten state of the Government, exists. In all my travels I have yet to see its equal. The ill-used and often squeezed Galla lives under the cruel yoke of Abyssinia in a state of freedom and happiness far surpassing that of the peasant of the "rich province of Azerbaijan." If these facts are neglected or suppressed for fear that their revelation should render more speedy than it will otherwise be the conquest of North-west Persia by Russia, then all that can be said is, the sooner Russia takes it the better. If it is on political grounds that we wish to preserve in a part of Persia in which we have no interest a state of government that is a disgrace to humanity, we ought to be ashamed of ourselves. It is true the Turki peasant is a wild, unsociable, and fanatical subject, hard to govern, given to robbery and crime, and as inhospitable and unsociable a creature, as far as Europeans are concerned, as can be met with anywhere; but at the same time we cannot find in this fact any excuse for the state of oppression and abject slavery in which he is held. Villages with all their inhabitants are given away as sources of revenue to private individuals, who, if they are in present need of

money, do not hesitate to carry off every removable piece of property, unless sufficient compensation in coin is paid by the poor people; and even if they stave over this first act of barbarism, they do so merely to be squeezed year by year, to see all their earnings and the results of their labour and toil taken from them. What may be the system of government in vogue in other portions of Persia I cannot say, but this I do assert, that for absolute cruelty, corruption, and oppression, the province of Azerbaijan stands unparalleled in my experience. But enough of an unpleasant subject, nor are we likely to see redress until the firm but just hand of Russia has seized the reins of power.

With regard to the sights to be seen in Tabriz, there are only three worthy of mention—the bazaars, the Blue Mosque, and the “Ark,” or fortress; for the dilapidated stucco villas, in the worst of possible combinations of bad styles of architecture, which the Vali-Aht calls his palaces, are beneath contempt.

The Blue Mosque, or Kabud Musjid, is so called by the exquisite faïence with which its walls and roofing were once decorated, and beautiful examples of which can still be seen, although the building is now a ruin. It was erected in the fifteenth century by Shah Jehan, an emperor of the Kara Koyunlu dynasty of Kurds. That it must in its day have been a building of the



THE BLUE MOSQUE, TABRIZ.



greatest beauty the little that remains of it to-day still certifies, for not only were its proportions perfect, but also the detail of the decoration that still remains is sufficient to give one a tolerable idea as to the whole. Unfortunately the genius of the architect and the wealth of the then Shah were wasted, for what it took men years to build was practically destroyed in one earthquake. The dome has fallen in, the roof disappeared, and the body of the mosque is heaped high with the *débris*, from which rise the pillars of a yellowish-pink brick inlaid and studded with designs in the most exquisite blue faïence, here and there brightened by some touch of yellow. Inscriptions of white on a dark-blue ground form friezes to what walls are still standing, and the great arched entrance, to-day in tolerable preservation, gives a very fair idea of what the whole must have been. At the farther end from the gateway, which corresponds to the chancel of a church, the lower portion of the walls is encircled with a dado of polished Maragha marble, bearing an inscription along the top. Curiously enough, the last slab on the right (south) side of the building was never completed, for the letters are in parts only roughly carved and in others merely outlined with the chisel.

Being a mosque belonging originally to the Moham-  
medans professing the Sunni doctrines, no great diffi-

culties are put in the way of Europeans entering the precincts, an impossibility in the case of those pertaining to the Sheiyas. A wooden paling with a gate, however, has been built across the entrance, and the simplest method of obtaining ingress is by clambering over one of the walls, where a pile of fallen ruins has rendered such a feat not only possible but very easy.

One little episode which happened to the friend with whom I visited the mosque and myself may not be unworthy of mention. Near the farther end there is a large slab missing in the floor, through which steps can be seen descending into some subterranean chamber. Proposing to Captain S. to descend, the Turkis who accompanied us tried to dissuade us from doing so, asserting that no one ever went down, and that the place was a "bad place, with devils in it." All the more keen to descend, it was only a minute or two later that my friend and I found ourselves below in a large vaulted chamber, in which the air was close and particularly offensive. Sufficient light not entering by the square hole at the head of the steps by which we had descended, we simultaneously struck matches. Imagine our horror when we found the vault full of corpses in all stages of decomposition, from skeletons with dry flesh sticking to the bones to nasty damp-looking bodies in soiled grave-clothes.

Needless to say we fled. On pushing inquiries as to the reason of this collection of corpses, we were told that the relatives of the deceased made use of this vault to store their dead in until they had scraped together sufficient means to send them for burial to the holy city of Kerbela, beyond Baghdad, where the Imam Huseyn, murdered on the battlefield, is buried.

This system of carrying dead bodies for interment in Turkish territory is a source of no little income to the pashalik of Baghdad; and when, some few years ago, Nasr ed-Din Shah forbade his subjects any longer to do so, or even to make pilgrimages to the holy shrine, on account of exorbitant taxes and difficulties put in their way by the Turkish authorities, the Osmanli Government was not long in carrying out its reforms, and settling by treaty the scale of taxation for burial and pilgrimage. But as it was to be the writer's lot a month or two later to follow the pilgrim road from Kermanshah to Baghdad, all further remarks can be postponed until then, when they will be more appropriate than at this spot.

The remaining antiquity of Tabriz is the "Ark," or fortress, an enormous pile of brick building, 130 feet in height. Built originally by Ali Shah, it contained at one time a magnificent mosque within its walls, of which no trace now remains. An idea of the size and labour of building this extraordinary structure can be

imagined when it is stated that its walls are nearly 28 feet in thickness. In form it is not unlike one of the towers of an Egyptian propylon, tapering as it ascends. Curzon relates that faithless wives used to be hurled off the summit, until one of these ladies, balanced in the air by her inflated petticoats, descended like a parachute to earth. There can be little doubt that the tower did at one time serve this purpose, and there is a rumour afloat in Tabriz to-day amongst the Europeans that it is not many years since the body of a young woman was found mangled at its foot. Early in this century Abbas Mirza added a large courtyard to the building and turned it into an arsenal; and if an arsenal consists of an empty court and a few rooms containing some small-arms, with a sprinkling of dirty, ill-kempt, and ill-mannered soldiers, it may still be said to retain its use. The one modern episode of interest that centres in this old tower-fortress is the fact that it was against its walls the "Bab," founder of the "Babi" sect, was shot in 1850.

The view from the summit of the Ark is a most extensive one. On the occasion of our visit, after a most pleasant luncheon with Mr Maclean, the local manager of the Imperial Bank of Persia, notice had been sent that we were coming, and the officer in charge had prepared the sweet tea in tiny tumblers



that the Persians so much affect. We climbed to the summit up the long outside flight of steps, and were glad to rest in the decorated little gallery at the top, sheltered from the hot rays of the sun. Below us lay Tabriz, which, from the fact that few of the houses are raised to a second storey except in the European quarter, seemed to place us on a higher elevation than we really were. To the southwest one's eyes wandered over the plain of the Aji-chai, far away toward Lake Urmiah; and although the water itself was not visible, the promontory of Shahi, which rises like an island from its surface, was perfectly discernible, probably some forty miles distant. There is certainly a charm about this bird's-eye view of Tabriz; for in spite of the monotony of the colour of its yellow mud roofs, it lies set in a ring of orchards and gardens that encompass the town almost on all sides. A few minarets rise to break the dead level of the houses, but none boasting of any particular features of interest or beauty; while a third of the town seems to consist of the mud domes which cover the miles of bazaars beneath.

It is these bazaars that attract the traveller more than anything else in Tabriz; and however much he may have seen of other Eastern cities, he cannot but be surprised at the magnitude, and admire the fine proportions and the picturesque appearance, of

those of Tabriz. Certainly they are a sight to be seen; and one could wander for hours, as the writer did, and never weary of the many phases of life to be found under those domed arcades. These bazaars commence in the neighbourhood of the Christian quarter—Arministan, the natives call it—and spread out in almost every direction. People in the position to know told me that in all there were some twenty-five miles of these covered streets; and often and long as I wandered about their shady ways I was continually finding myself in parts I had never seen before, and always absolutely at a loss as to my whereabouts, for nothing more bewildering can well be imagined than the almost painful sameness of the Tabriz bazaars. The crowd in each seems just the same, for so exactly is the costume of the people repeated according to their various degrees, that, until one has become somewhat accustomed to the type, all men seem to look alike. Certainly the bazaars at Tabriz, offering though they do every variety of native life, present but comparatively few specimens of races foreign to the country; for so surrounded is the town by a Turki population that scarcely a Persian or an Arab is to be found in the entire city. Armenians there are in plenty, but, strange as it may sound, no Jews. For this there are probably

two reasons: firstly, and most important, the fact that the fanaticism of the Sheiya inhabitants does not permit of the security of person or property, and the few native Jews who have from time to time entered the city were hooted in the streets; and secondly, that the business talent, not to say grasping nature, of the Armenians, their money-lending and general usury, would render even a Jew's business unprofitable.

Generally speaking, the Tabriz bazaars consist of long, straight, covered streets, with lofty roofs, the whole constructed of brick, and neatly and well built. The breadth of these great arcades varies as a rule according to the wealth of the shops that line its walls, though in this I am probably putting the cart before the horse, for it is more likely that the richest merchants affect the better bazaars. In places these long covered ways open out into great halls, of immense size, and with their roofs 50 to 60 feet from the ground, the whole most handsomely built, with domes and decorative supports. Every now and then, too, one emerges from the dark ways into great patches of sunlight, fine open squares, planted with trees, and boasting pools of water in their centres, and surrounded on all sides by the handsome buildings which serve as stores, shops, and more generally offices. These open spaces often wear the most

picturesque appearance, from the piles of rich carpets laid out in the sunlight to fade to the more appreciated tints before being exported.

There are a few streets in the bazaar that could scarcely fail to interest and attract the most callous of strangers; one, half a mile in length, in which every box-like shop is the store of a carpet-dealer, and where a perspective view of the whole presents a seemingly never-ending array of carpets. The colouring can be better imagined than described; and when between these walls of woven pictures is added the bustling crowd and stately merchants, and above is added the roofing of dome following dome and arch after arch, the whole is indeed a most striking picture. Lovely carpets there are to be seen, too, a collection from all parts of Persia, from coarsely woven ones yards square to the delicate little silk rugs, for which such enormous prices are demanded and paid. Near this bazaar is another equally attractive, where saddlery, commoner kinds of country rugs, saddle-bags, and tenting are for sale,—a wondrous array of brilliant-coloured articles, not only bulging through the fronts of the shops, but also hung up upon poles and nails wherever there is room. Here, too, the crowd differs from the richer and more respectable carpet street; for whereas in the former the stately merchant, the fanatical mollah, and the

richer portion of the population are found, here a crowd of countrymen, in dirty sheepskin coats and absurd head-gear of rough wool, congregate. Sunburnt hardy men they are, with eyes pointing to a Mongol origin, and speaking a strange Turkman dialect, very different in their noisy talk and quick manner from the graceful and stately townspeople, in their long robes of fine wool or silk, and their neatly folded turban, or black lambskin hat.

But the one drawback to the bazaars of Tabriz is the fanatical temperament of the people. Pass which way one will, one is scowled at by the shopkeepers, and muttered curses meet one's ears. True, there is little or no open insult, but a good deal of the pleasure of one's excursion is lost when one feels that one has not a single feeling in accord with the natives. Very different is it in Kurdistan or Baghdad, or anywhere for that matter, amongst Arabs; for there, in spite of the innate feeling against Christians that exists in the hearts of all Moslems, the people are at least ready to make friends and invite one to drink coffee or sit and smoke in their shops. But in Tabriz I was on more than one occasion unable to make purchases in the shops, by the owner refusing to have dealings with an infidel. So fanatical are the natives that it is impossible to obtain a cup of tea or coffee, and gen-

erally even a drink of water, unless one has one's own cup to drink it out of. Even Mohammed, my Arab servant, was refused coffee on account of his being a Sunni; but he took the law into his own hands, and consigning all the souls of the people present to a climate even warmer than that of Tabriz in summer, and heaping upon them every bad name he could think off, helped himself to what he wanted. Such cowards are the Tabrizis that the greater part fled, and the owner of the *café*, one of the largest in Tabriz, called him "my lord" until we left. This little incident will show how strong the feeling is amongst the Sheiyas against the Sunni sect.

But despise the people of Tabriz as one may, one cannot but acknowledge that amongst the men—one never sees the women—the type is an exceedingly fine one, and faces of great beauty are quite common in the bazaars. As a rule, in the case of the upper class the skins are very white, the noses well formed and slightly aquiline, the mouth firm and powerful, and the face oval. Added to perfectly modelled features are the black arched brows and fiery eyes beneath, the whole framed in a turban of dark-blue or white muslin—the sign of the seyids, or mollahs. In figure they are of an average height, and slightly built, and walk with much grace and dignity. The one absent charm is expression, for their pale faces

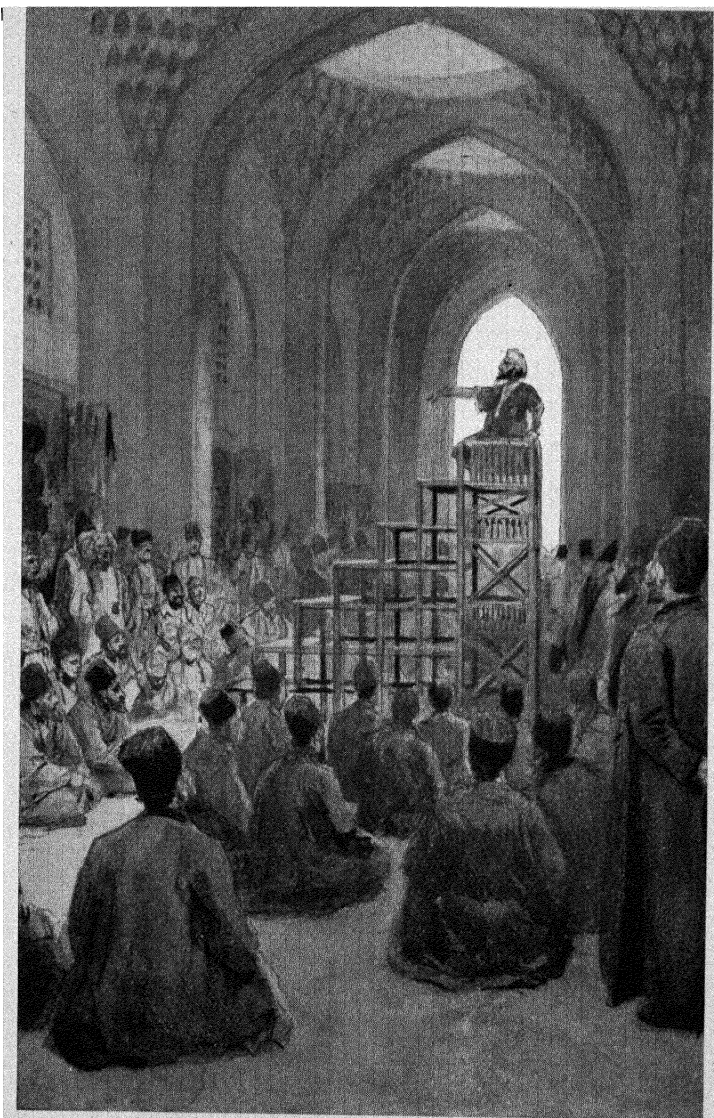
and dark eyes seldom light up into a smile or show any signs of vivacity. So arrogant are they in manners toward Europeans that I never hesitated to tell them laughingly that I hoped to return to Tabriz when, in place of the miserable, dirty, and ragged soldiery, the Russian Cossack would parade the streets; and one and all in reply acknowledged that the day was coming. In conversation, whenever one could break through the ice of fanaticism, the Tabrizis seem to be by no means backward, and they show a much larger knowledge of affairs political and general than one would be led to expect.

But it is not in the principal streets of the bazaars that the searcher after curiosities must go; he must rather search out the grimy alleys of the older parts, where pawnbrokers and second-hand dealers expose their wares for sale, though as a rule any articles of value are carefully hidden away in the shopkeeper's private house. He is ready enough, however, to bring them out when he thinks there is any likelihood of obtaining a good price, and then the collector may chance upon finding something really good in the way of old armour, swords, embroideries, or works of art. As soon as it became known in Tabriz that I was in search of antiquities and curiosities, there used to appear several times a-day at the Consulate auctioneers and

vendors of second-hand articles, who often have in their possession a regular collection. Nor are the prices in Tabriz exorbitant—in fact, in comparison with other oriental towns, where the markets have been spoiled by rich people, curiosities can be obtained there at exceedingly reasonable prices. There must always be taken into consideration, however, the difficulty and risk of sending things home; for to send them through Russian territory means paying exorbitant customs duties, while the route across Asia Minor to Trebizond is both expensive and long. Curiosities sent from Tabriz by me in April reached Gibraltar at the end of August!

There was one scene to be witnessed now and again in the bazaars that was particularly interesting—the narration of the story of Ali, and the death of his son Huseyn at Kerbela, by a Turki mollah. A portion of one of the largest and most important bazaars would be roped off so as to prevent a crowd of passers-by, and the enclosed space carpeted. In the centre was a high pulpit somewhat resembling scaffolding, and upon this the mollah would take up his position. A crowd of the better class townspeople, with here and there a peasant from the country, would seat themselves upon the carpets, and the mollah, swaying his body to and fro, commence the narration of those





A "MOLLAH" NARRATING THE STORY OF THE BATTLE OF KERBELA  
IN THE BAZAAR AT TABRIZ.



tragic acts of the history of Islam — the death of Ali, and the murder of his son Huseyn at Kerbela. As, with high-pitched voice, he continued his story, his words ringing through the whole bazaar and echoing and re-echoing from the domes above, a wild sobbing and sighing would commence from the crowd beneath, sometimes breaking forth into a wail of mourning. The scene was a most impressive one, even though the moment the sermon was over the listeners hurried back to their shops with quickly dried tears, intent upon their various trades; for in spite of the appearance of genuine sorrow very little is really felt, and the tears are what are proverbially known as pertaining to the crocodile. But in spite of the fact that one knows the whole affair to be more of a pantomime than any ebullition of feeling of respect for their religion, one is grateful to them in that they give one an insight into Persian life and the representation of a scene as impressive as it is picturesque. I was not, unfortunately, in the country to witness the annual passion-play, in which the same subject is treated with all the characters and costumes of a theatre, but shall never regret having had the opportunity several times in the grand bazaars of Tabriz of seeing the spectacle described above.

The time was drawing near for a departure to be made for "countries new," and already I had stayed longer than I had intended in my hospitable quarters at the Consulate-General. I therefore set to work in earnest to procure the horses and a man necessary for my travels. In both cases fortune and the good counsel of friends aided me, and before long I found myself possessed of three very tolerably good steeds—one far above the average of horses in this part of Persia, notwithstanding the fact that they are, as a rule, sturdy willing beasts. As to servants, my Arab Mohammed had accompanied me from Morocco, and I found another in the person of a former Consulate servant—a Turki of the name of Yusef, who spoke, as well as his native tongue, Persian and English. Nor had I reason to regret my fortune in lighting upon either this man or the horses, for the latter, without an accident, brought us in safety to Baghdad nearly two months later; while Yusef's willingness to do all in his power to be useful, and his skill as an interpreter, made up amply for his lack of knowledge regarding horses, and his terror of robbers. In both cases, however, I soon found him improved by his travels; for though his fear did not desert him, and his complexion still turned pale green whenever we met anybody who might even

be imagined to be a robber—and all the natives in these parts of the world bear that appearance more or less—he soon became, from personal experience, aware that the back-legs of a horsē sometimes kicked, and that the closing of equine teeth upon one's limbs or elsewhere on one's body was not at all a pleasing sensation. Poor Yusef! I fear I lost my temper once or twice with him; but he was so mild and gentle, and on the whole an excellent servant, and thoroughly honest, and we parted in Baghdad the best of friends—he with one of my horses to complete his pilgrimage on to Kerbela, and I with a pleasant recollection of his good-nature and general usefulness. For travelling anywhere in Persia he is invaluable, but he has Kurds on the brain; nor did Mohammed's and my own chaff tend to render him less fearful of these kind and hospitable mountaineers. And so it was one fine hot morning early in May I bade adieu to my kindest of hosts and hostesses, Mr and Mrs Cecil Wood, at the gate of the British Consulate, and trotted away down the street, followed by my two men, all three of us mounted on comfortable Kurdish saddles, carrying such scanty baggage as we possessed slung on behind.

An hour later I turned back as we crossed the ridge of a stony hill, and took my last view at the

city of Tabriz, a yellow blot in its surroundings of green gardens, with the old Ark or fortress rising like a giant mud-heap from the centre. Then, with a dig of the sharp corners of my native stirrups, I set my horse to a gallop, and in a few minutes had caught up the two men.

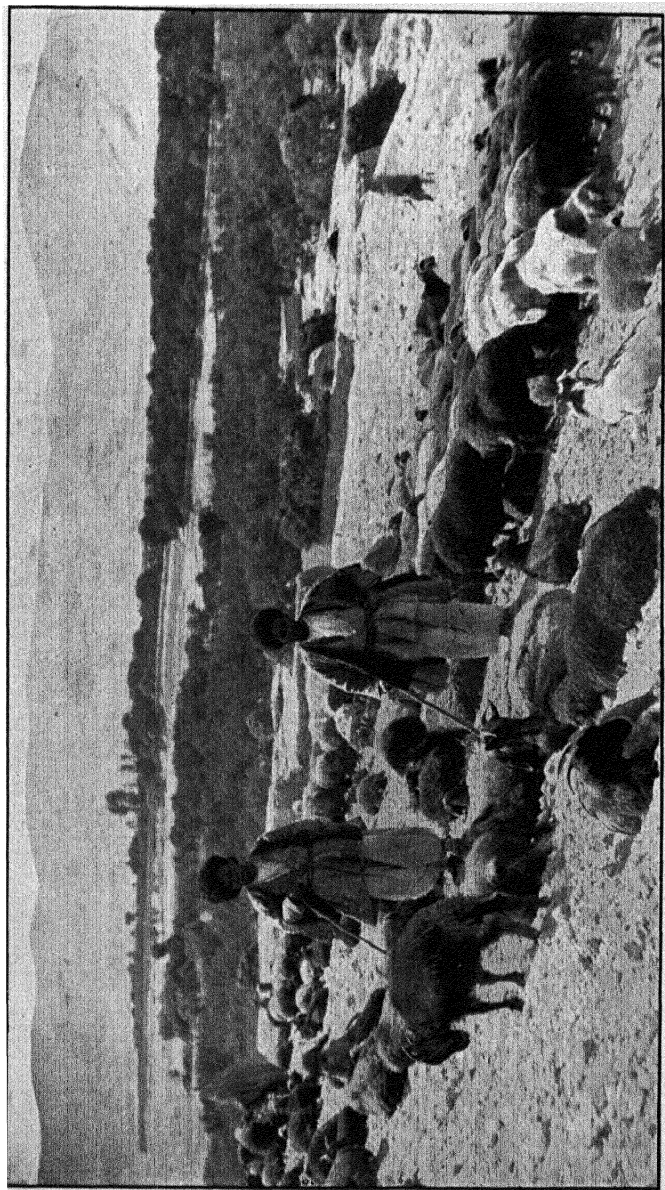
## CHAPTER VI.

## TABRIZ TO MARAGHA.

MY last glimpse of Tabriz as I rode away was from a stony ridge of one of the low spurs of Mount Sahend, near the picturesque little mud-village of Lala, nestling green amongst its trees in a hollow of an otherwise bare landscape. Our road continued over the plain of the Aji-chai, the river of Tabriz which eventually empties its waters into the lake of Urmiyah. In the fresh May morning the scene looked wonderfully bright and cheerful. On our right lay the flat ground, stretching far away to the north and east, to where in the faint distance the mountains at the north end and farther side of Lake Urmiyah bounded the horizon. On the left rose the spurs of Mount Sahend, rising tier above tier to the snow summit of the central peak, over 11,000 feet above the sea-level. The plain, as we skirted its south-eastern corner, was well cultivated and irrigated, and showed all the signs of its boasted fertility.

Saaderut was the first place of any importance through which our road led us. It is a large village, through the very centre of which the caravan-road passes. Part of this main street is loosely roofed over, forming the village bazaar, which, poor as it is, wears a somewhat flourishing appearance, from the fact that most of the houses are two storeys in height. The bazaar presented the usual scenes of an oriental village—little box-like shops with their platforms in front of them, on which were exposed the cheap commodities of oriental life, varied by ropes of black goat's hair and hobbles for tethering the caravan animals, &c. One larger shop exposed to view the end of an oven. Here a smooth polished counter lay covered with the flat pancake-like bread of the country, while from the dark depths of the furnace a couple of swarthy long-haired Turkis, stripped to the waist, were extracting a further supply of the same indigestible stuff. But it was only for a few minutes that our way was varied by the village scenes, for the place is but a small one, and we did not linger. Then the open plain again, green with the rising corn, and here and there dotted with gardens of fruit and poplar trees. Life stirred on all sides. Ragged soldiery were returning from an abortive expedition to the Kurdish provinces, many mounted on donkeys and still more trudging barefoot, ill-kempt and half





SHEPHERDS.



starved, walking with weary faltering steps, the first half a mile ahead of the last, with no officers and no attempt at order. Flocks and herds grazed by the roadside, the brown fat-tailed sheep and picturesque scared-looking goats, while from bush to bush, or on the open fields, hopped grey crows, hoopoes, and magpies, cawing and chattering and whistling. Then a long strip of uninteresting plain brought our little caravan to the khan of Yanok, a solitary betowered and bewalled building, enclosing a large courtyard, surrounded by tiny rooms. Here we rested for the refreshment of man and beast. A picturesque scene it was within the walls of the caravanserai, for our little party of Turki, Arab, and Englishman were by no means the only travellers who were resting at this Government half-way house, as a number of Turki caravan-men, in their strange mushroom-like hats and dirty skirted coats of soiled cloth, were seated or lying asleep in the vicinity of their tethered pack-horses, and one entire corner was occupied by a score of camels with jingling bells and head-gear of red cloth, feathers, shells, and mirrors, the whole bedecked with embroidery and tassels.

After an hour's rest we set off again, and as sunset was nearing reached a dreary caravanserai, a mile to the north of the little town of Mamerghan. Finding that, owing to having delayed in Tabriz, it would be

impossible for us to reach Gogan, we sought quarters in this inhospitable-looking ruin, and found to our relief that there was a tolerably comfortable room with a verandah over the arched doorway, and ample stabling for our horses. The whole building was constructed of mud, which, owing to the climate, is tolerably durable. The roof of our room consisted of mats of coarse reeds laid over poplar poles, the whole covered outside with a thick coating of the same kind of native mud as the building was made of. Fortunately this spot does not form a common resting-place for caravans, so that we had the entire building to ourselves, and the uninterrupted service of the two or three poverty-looking Turkis in charge. From the verandah in front of the one guest-room of the place a fine view was obtained of the surrounding country. To the east lay Mount Sahend, covered with snow, and to the west the mountains of the promontory of Shahi, or Shahu, which at this time of year forms an island in the lake of Urmiyah. Near as was this great sheet of water it was not visible, though its surrounding marshes of dark mud, green reeds, and incrustation of salt, formed a strange and desolate panorama in that direction. On one of the spurs of Sahend to the east lay, only a few miles distant, the little town of Mamerghan, a blot of yellow mud amongst the green corn-fields. Day

ended in a glorious sunset, and still more glorious afterglow that turned all the peaks to a colour of gold and roses, and then the stars and the rats came out, and stayed all night.

The following day, May 13, we were off early across the plain, both Yusef and Mohammed singing the airs of their respective countries as they rode along, all of us rejoicing in the fresh sunny morning. Arriving at a stream of delicious clear water we let our horses drink, and here I gained my first insight into the character of Yusef as regards his knowledge of horses and their ways, for he at once took off the bridle and let the youngest and most skittish of my horses loose. Off it scampered across the plain, kicking as it went, full tilt into a caravan of pack-horses that were grazing with their loads on their backs in the immediate vicinity. Whereupon a shouting of the Turki caravan-men, the air filled with guttural curses, Yusef crying on the bank of a stream, Mohammed yelling in Arabic, a language I was the only one present to comprehend,—and then a chase. It took an hour of hard running and gentle wheedling to catch the horse: how long it took the caravan-men to replace the packs, &c., that their beasts had kicked off in the general stampede I did not wait to see. The place was getting sultry, so I said good-bye from a distance, gave Yusef a piece of my mind, and

rode on again. An hour or more of the cool morning was lost, and I saw in advance the mid-day rest for man and beast curtailed.

At Gogan we turned aside from the main street of the village and entered a large caravanserai, with a most picturesque entrance, a high deep archway crossed half-way up by a wooden bridge joining two galleries that led to little rooms on each side of the arch. Like all the other buildings in this part of Persia, the entire place was constructed of sun-dried brick plastered with mud. Within, a gallery surrounded this square courtyard on the first floor, and here a comfortable and tolerably clean little room was found for our accommodation, while tea was prepared and our horses shod. Here, too, the caravanserai was full of mules, horses, and camels, the former principally belonging to a large caravan of pilgrims returning from their long journey to the holy shrines in the vicinity of Baghdad. Tired and bedraggled these pilgrims seemed to be after their march of nearly a thousand miles ; but Tabriz was their destination, and on the morrow they hoped to arrive, and receive the welcome and homage which the Sheiya world of Persia pays to the pilgrim from Kerbela, who hereafter has the right to style himself "Kerbelaï," in the same manner as the pilgrims to Mecca become "Hajis."

Gogan is surrounded by walled gardens of fruit-trees and poplars and walnuts, and at this time of year, when all were in leaf, the little mud-built town presented quite a charming appearance of freshness and fertility. It was amongst these gardens that we had forded the Masragh Chai, a small river, just before arriving at the place.

Beyond the caravanserai is an open space on to which the village mosque looks, a picturesque building with its great glassless arched windows filled in with trellis-work, that gave a deliciously cool appearance to the interior. A small stream bisects this open square crossed by a stone bridge of one span, but sufficient with the surroundings to add an appearance of charm to the scene.

From here a long street with shops and caravanserais on either side leads one out of the little town, and a picturesque street it is, lined with overhanging wooden balconies on which the travellers and caravan-men sat smoking their *kalyans*, or water pipes with straight stems, dressed in every colour, and presenting every variety of Persian, Turkish, Turkman, and Kurdish type of countenance and head-gear,—for Gogan is a large station on the road, and nearly all caravans stop here. Emerging from the village, the road proceeds beneath the slopes of a cemetery, in which were some curious old gravestones—particu-

larly a ram and a lion, roughly hewn out of grey stone, each almost, if not quite, life-size. So primitive are they in character that they much resemble the curious carvings over the kings of the early dynasties in China. We had left the plain at Gogan, and now began to travel over undulating country, alternately crossing hills and open flat valleys, through which the streams from the snows of Mount Sahend find their way to the lake. Every now and then where the road ascended we could catch a charming glimpse of Lake Urmiyah on our west, the great expanse of blue water lying unruffled by the least breeze, bounded by the Kurdish snow-peaks beyond the town of Urmi on its farther side.

Like Southern Russia and Turkey, Persia is possessed of one of those three large sheets of water that form so noticeable a feature in the formation of this portion of the world — Lakes Gokcha and Van, in Russian and Turkish territory respectively; while Urmiyah, in Azerbaijan, takes their place on this side of the frontier. The lake which is usually known to Europeans as Urmiyah, from the town of Urmi, situated not far from its western shore, is called generally by the natives Daria-i-Shahi, or Royal Sea. While the waters of the other two are fresh, those of Lake Urmiyah are the saltiest known in any part of the world, and contain over 20 per



cent of that mineral and a proportionately large quantity of iodine, thus excelling in this feature the Dead Sea. But it is by no means only from this point of view that Lake Urmiah deserves notice, for in size it forms an important feature. Its length is eighty-five miles, with an average breadth of twenty-five, and it lies at an elevation of over 4000 feet above the sea-level. The edge of



*Lake Urmiah from the road to Maragha.*

the lake, to which I have already briefly referred, consists of low marshy land, the immediate proximity of the water being covered with a coating of white salt, giving much the appearance of ice. The depth varies but little, being extremely shallow at all parts, while the extreme saltness of the water prevents the existence of any life with the exception of that of a minute jelly-fish. The surface is, however, largely the resort of aquatic birds, which

seem, while building their nests in its vicinity, to go farther afield for food, and at Suj-bulak, and even nearly as far as Serdasht, I saw quantities of sea-gulls.

Toward the southern end of Lake Urmiyah are scattered a number of small islands, of which the great part are mere rocks, though several allow of their being utilised as grazing-ground for sheep in winter; and on one of these Hulaku is said to have built a treasury, though what evidence there is for this report it is difficult to say, for Hulaku's treasuries appear to exist in many places throughout the country, if one is to believe current tradition. In spite of the advantages that the lake of Urmiyah offers for navigation, only three half-decked sailing-boats ply upon its waters, which are in the hands of Vali-Aht, but are sublet to a local official, the governor of Maragha, who, after paying an extortionate price for the monopoly, is able to draw a substantial income. How advantageous a fleet of sailing-boats would be is appreciable when the character of the country surrounding the lake is taken into consideration; for the rich plains at the south and south-east extremity produce an enormous quantity of grain, of which the carriage by caravan materially raises the price in the districts of Tabriz, whereas were boats available for its transport it

could be sold at a large profit to the growers and a great reduction to the consumers; but then the governor of Maragha and the contractor would lose their profits, which in the eyes of officialdom in Persia is of far greater moment.

At a miserable hovel by the roadside we drank a cup of sweet Persian tea out of the small glass tumblers in use in the country. Poor stuff, and a poor little place altogether it was, but it gave us an opportunity of a talk with the old bundle of rags who kept the *café*. He was a native of Khoneya, a large village a mile or two to the west off the main road, and he eked out a small existence by selling tea to the wayfarers. While seated here half-a-dozen miserable soldiers came up, half-starved and in rags. They were part of the army (!) returning from an expedition which had been sent from Tabriz to Kurdistan on account of some difficulties there. They had, after great trouble, arrived at their destination, though nothing, however, had come of it, and no fighting had taken place; so their officers in command returned and left the totally unprovided-for troops to find their way back as best they could, which they did by begging food and shelter from village to village. They are curious people these Persian soldiers of Azerbaijan, and ill-treated as they are, said they had nothing

to complain of, their pride not allowing them to do so to a European. They received, they said, 7 toman a-year—at the present rate of exchange a toman equals something over 3s.—and two suits of uniform!

A few miles farther on is a guard-house, situated on a desolate part of the road, and protected by a guard of Kurdish soldiers, the most terrifying brigands to look at, but full of laughter and good-nature, who insisted on my coming in and drinking tea with them, though they readily accepted a small bakshish in return, a proceeding they would not have ventured to do in their own country. The road here is uninhabited and desolate, and not unfrequently caravans are robbed at this spot, though I was told that it was not until after the baggage of some important official had been stolen that the almost daily complaints of robberies were attended to, and the guard-house built and the half-dozen soldiers quartered there.

From this spot the road descends by a winding course to the plains of Ajebshehr, in which are situated the famous marble springs and pits of Maragha, which take their name from the town some fifteen or twenty miles beyond.

There are quite a number of these strange phenomena all situated within a small area. The water, which emerges from the ground, contains large quan-

tities of lime and oxide, apparently, of iron. A precipitation like rock-salt is continually being formed around the springs, which gradually solidifies and hardens into solid blocks of from 6 to 8 inches in thickness, which, while hard enough to be durable, can be sawn into plates of the thickness required. The marble is very handsome, much resembling alabaster, but with the addition of streaks of colour and opalesque tints. The supply, however, appears to be limited, for the natives told me that the formation is very much slower now than formerly, and there is a tradition that the water was once boiling. Two or three smaller springs, but of the same nature, are to be found in the very middle of the Tabriz-Maragha road, between the guard-house on the hill I mentioned and the plain below, about half-way down the slope. Here I drank some of the water, which is gaseous, tasting much like ordinary soda-water. At these small springs, of which no use is made, one can see the curious formation of the little cones of precipitated lime, resembling miniature volcanoes, only a very few inches in height. The supply of water is intermittent, and one spring threw a little jet of water about a foot above the level of the ground regularly every nine seconds. Sufficient water is given off by these tiny sources in the road to form a small stream, the banks and beds of which

are covered with the crystalline sediment. A few miles more of plain and we reached the large village of Ajebshahr. After half an hour of road between walled gardens of fruit-trees, walnuts, and poplars, we entered the village, near a rather handsome brick mosque with the usual great trellised windows.

There is a custom all over North and West Persia, and I daresay also in other parts of the country, of seeking a night's lodgings with private individuals. For instance, a man owns a house in which there is a certain amount of accommodation and perhaps a stable. He does not in the least think it *infra dig.* to take in lodgers for the night; nor is there any difficulty in finding such lodging, for even the passers-by in the street will direct one to such a place. For a small party travelling without tents, bedding, or luggage, as we were, this means far greater comfort, quiet, and cleanliness than in the overcrowded khans and caravanserais, and wherever possible we availed ourselves of this means of obtaining food and shelter. The payment is very small, the owner of the house merely adding up the items of food, and one paying a small bakshish over and above for the accommodation. I doubt if this food for myself and three servants, barley for our three horses, and our lodging, with use of cooking utensils and *samovar* for our tea, ever cost us above the

equivalent of 3s. to 4s. any night of the entire journey, and yet I never left the house of one of our humble hosts without hearing poured on my head really sincere words and blessings of gratitude. So mean are the people amongst themselves, that in these uncivilised and little-travelled districts of Persia the slightest generosity—the payment of 2d. above the absolutely necessary price—is a surprise and a pleasure. This not only renders travelling very cheap, but also leaves behind a pleasant recollection of the traveller,—as eminently satisfactory a state of affairs as one could desire.

The quarters we found for ourselves in Ajebshehr consisted of a couple of rooms on the first floor of a house overlooking a yard, in which was stabling for our horses. The rooms were simple and poor enough, but the warm nights and balmy air did not necessitate much in the way of windows or doors—in fact I preferred, on account of the probable vicinity of vermin, to seek my rest on the open roof. Our host was an old Turki mollah, and a horrid old fanatic to look at, with his eyelashes blackened with antimony and his white beard died yellow. But as soon as night set in, and there was no chance of his neighbours looking on, I found him ready enough to come and sit with us and share the humble supper and tea which my men and I always took together; for no

Sheiya in Persia will, as a rule, touch food with a European, much less a mollah, whose position answers somewhat to that of a parish priest.

The gardens of Ajebshehr are very luxuriant, and walnut-trees, the jujube, filbert, almond, and other fruit-trees flourish. Much planting, too, was going on in the neighbourhood, showing that there is profit in such things. The vineyards are excellently kept, the vines being grown upon high narrow banks of earth divided from one another by deep ditches so as to allow of irrigation in the dry seasons. In fact all the cultivation of this part of Persia is entirely dependent upon artificial means for nourishment. The proximity of Mount Sahend, and the streams it is continually pouring down from its snow-peaks, give an unlimited supply of water, which is greedily drawn aside by the tillers of the soil; and it is this never-ceasing supply that causes the richness and fertility of the east side of Lake Urmiyah.

But while the better class and land-owning peasant is able to gain a livelihood from his gardens and his fields, the labourer has a bad time, as the following fact shows that the natives of this portion of Persia, and even from far beyond, make yearly journeys into Russian territory—150 miles distant to the frontier alone—to earn higher wages by harvesting. We passed every day long strings of these poor



fellows trudging along the dusty roads toward Tabriz, on their way to seek their fortune from the despised Christians. Immediately the harvest is completed and gathered they return, bringing their hardly-won earnings with them.

The next morning we were off at sunrise, for having no luggage save a small bundle each, tied on behind our saddles, there was no delay. The road lies for two *farsakhs* (seven to eight miles) across the plain as far as Al-Goh, a poverty-stricken village at the foot of some low hills. A large round tower of mud bricks stands at the north side of the place, of which the original use seems forgotten, though its present purpose is well enough known to the natives, for here the tax-collector resides on his annual visit at harvest-time. While resting under the shade of a wall—for there was no other protection from the sun—in the courtyard of the wretched caravanserai, a number of Turki pilgrims arrived on their way to Kerbela, with their veiled women and children, and the scene was rendered bright by the clanging of the great copper bells on the horses' necks and the voices of the little party. Poor as the village was, the gardens in the neighbourhood were rich and luxuriant; but probably most of the profit of the produce finds its way into the capacious and rapacious claws of the officials.

Two and a half hours of hilly road and suddenly, turning a corner, a most charming view met our gaze—the town of Maragha, nestling in an endless succession of gardens, amidst streams of dancing water and in vegetation almost tropical in its luxuriance. Everywhere native industry has dug little canals, carrying the streams here, there, and everywhere; and wherever the water reaches vegetation springs up. The road winds down amongst these lovely gardens of fruit and forest trees, now past clear pools of still water, now along the banks of splashing channels, till the bed of the Safi Chai, the river of Maragha, is reached.

A handsome bridge of brick gives entrance to the town, and the scene here was charming indeed: the fast-flowing river, with its clear wide stream and banks of trees and gardens, amongst which a number of handsome Persian tents were pitched; the fine brick bridge, and the old tower and dome of a half-ruined building at the entrance to the town, with a background of woods and mountains,—formed as charming a picture as I saw anywhere in Persia.

Passing the handsome ruin mentioned above, with its walls of red brick inlaid with beautiful examples of blue faïence, we rode into the town, a crowd collecting round us and accompanying us on our way, for it is very seldom indeed that a European

enters Maragha. A large mosque, with trees in front of it, was passed, and then on into the bazaars, with their roofs of matting laid over poplar poles, until we found quarters for our stay in a large new and clean caravanserai, with stables near at hand. The building in which our quarters were situated was separated from the courtyard, and consisted of shops and stores, neatly built in the form of an octagon round a paved court, with a fountain of none too clean water in the centre. Here we soon made ourselves comfortable, thanks to the assiduous care of the owner of the place, and after having watered and fed our horses and seen them comfortably housed, we lay down to pass the heat of the afternoon in sleep.

## CHAPTER VII.

## MARAGHA TO MIYANDOB.

MARAGHA to-day boasts little of the appearance it must have borne when it formed one of the residences of the Mongol Emperor Hulaku ; for now, in spite of the fact that the place is a flourishing one for its size, it presents but few architectural features beyond the ordinary type of modern Persian architecture. Yet there are still to be seen a few remains of its once famous antiquities ; for at one time, during the residence of Hulaku, it was a centre of learning and art, and here that prince built for Nasr ed-Din, the astronomer, the famous observatory in which the Alkhani Tables were compiled. I was unable in my visit to discover any remains of the observatory, though buildings dating from the period of Hulaku undoubtedly do remain,—such, for instance, as the beautiful octagonal tower of delicate and intricate brickwork, with its half-

ruined dome and its inlaid work of exquisite faïence. I was told that tradition states this tower to have been the tomb of Hulaku himself, who died in 1265 A.D. ; but it appears that the famous Mongol general and emperor was interred on the Shahi promontory, overlooking Lake Urmiah. That the tower was a tomb at all cannot be stated for certain, for it contains three storeys of domed chambers lit with windows, and the ground-floor, built of well-cut stone, is entered by an arched doorway, and bears within no traces or appearance of ever having served the purpose that tradition has accredited to it. From its situation, on the slope of a hill, and the absence of any signs of surrounding tombs, and from the beautiful views to be obtained from its windows, it does not seem improbable that the place was once one of those summer-houses in which the oriental all the world over loves to recline during the heat of the day, fanned by every breeze that may blow. No doubt the question could be easily solved by the deciphering of the inscription of blue faïence that surrounds the building just below the dome ; but unfortunately the fact that my visit was made late in the afternoon, and the height of the tower, prevented my being able to spell out the intricate and decorative Arabic inscription.

I entered the lower chamber of the tower and found it to be a vaulted and arched room, well built and faced of square blocks of stone. The present heir-apparent of Persia, the Vali-Aht, Viceroy of the province of Azerbaijan, in which district Maragha is situated, had on his visit here a few years ago done his best to destroy the building by attempting to remove the stones of the walls and foundations in a search for treasure ; but so effete is the Persian of to-day that he failed to more than move the solidly placed stones. He desired, I was told, to resort to powder in order to continue his search, but the owners of the neighbouring houses clamoured out so loudly that he was persuaded to desist. From the stories current about his Royal Highness, this is the only energetic work I ever heard of his engaging upon—to destroy one of the few beautiful buildings in his province ; but even here his weak character won the day and, happily, he failed.

The one other building of importance in Maragha is the bridge over the river by which we had entered the town. This structure, however, does not boast of any great antiquity, having been built in 1809. It is a handsome piece of work with six arches, and possesses the same peculiarity that the bridge over the Aji-chai at Tabriz does, that it is not straight. The northern part of the bridge points up the stream,

and when half has been crossed the rest takes a turn to the right, forming an obtuse angle in the centre. Whether this is supposed to be a means of defence, or merely a strengthening of the structure against floods, I was unable to discover.

Nor do the bazaars at Maragha present any feature of difference from those of other small Persian towns. They appear to be well supplied with the necessities of life—which are here very cheap—and a quantity of imported manufactures, principally printed cottons. The only native manufacture seems to be that of glass, and this only for the flat, narrow, circular bottles in common use in the country for oil and wine. Of the latter the Armenian, Nestorian, and Jewish population make considerable quantities, and seem to be one and all addicted to the use of the juice of the grape.

It is impossible to give any valuable or reliable statement as to the population of Maragha. Probably the town contains in all some 15,000 souls, of which a third are Jews, Armenians, and Nestorians. Of the latter there are very few, but the Christian quarter seems the richest and best populated. It is needless to say there are no European inhabitants, though now and again the members of the American Mission pay a visit to the charming little town, where, under a certain converted Nestorian, a Protes-

tant school for native Christians has been instituted, and seems doing good work.

To this Nestorian gentleman I owe a debt of gratitude, for he not only entertained me at a sumptuous tea in his picturesque house, but kindly volunteered to show me such sights as Maragha possesses, and it was under his guidance that I visited the bazaars and the tower of which I have spoken above.

This may not be an unsuitable spot to introduce a few words regarding the Nestorians, or Chaldæans, as another division of their sect is called. Personally I came but very little into contact with these people, for their strongholds lie to the west and north of Lake Urmiyah, and my journey led me to the east and south, but nevertheless some mention must be made of this curious people.

In the fifth century A.D. Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople, was excommunicated for heresy. His doctrine, it appears, was with regard to the incarnation of Christ, who, he asserted, possessed two separate natures and a dual personality. Banished by the third General Council of the Church of Ephesus, he fled with a following to Persia. Here the new religion prospered, converts were made far and near throughout the surrounding countries, missionaries full of zeal carried the faith into distant regions, and the followers of Nestorius found them-



selves in a comparatively short time both numerically and politically powerful. So strong, indeed, did the sect become, that we hear of no less than twenty-five bishoprics being established, the influence of which extended from the western portions of China to Abyssinia, where Prester John, the king, was converted. But meanwhile there was springing up a new power, which was gradually surging over the whole of Asia, and in the fourteenth century burst with fury over the country which was the centre of the Christian doctrine. This was the invasion of the Tatars under Timur, or Tamerlane, and with them commenced a series of persecutions that, except for the refugees who fled to the highlands of Kurdistan, wiped out the Nestorian religion. It is there now-days that one must look for the Nestorians. Some, it is true, have gradually sought the more productive plains of the west shores of Lake Urmiah, and some wandered into Mesopotamia as far as Mosul. In all, the followers of the Nestorian doctrine number perhaps 180,000 to-day, of which nearly 50,000 live in Persia.

So long a period has passed since their foundation that the present representatives of their sect possess but little knowledge with regard to its ancient history. The name of Nestorius is almost unknown amongst them, and they themselves claim to be the

followers of St Paul and St Jude. But not only do the Nestorians form a sect apart, but are a separate race to any of the many peoples residing in this portion of the country. Their language, a form of Syriac, is so like to Arabic that when read aloud I was able to comprehend the general gist of what was being said, though in conversation I could understand but little, the old language having to-day degenerated into a patois, full of words and expressions borrowed from the Kurds, Persians, and Turks.

It would be too long a matter to trace out here the various disputes and divisions that have at times split up the followers of the Nestorian doctrines, who for political purposes and motives of private jealousy have separated and quarrelled. Let it suffice to say that to-day there exist three principal branches of the faith—(1) the old Nestorians under Mar Shimun, the hereditary Patriarch; (2) the Chaldæans under the Patriarch of Babylon, resident in Baghdad; and (3) the Chaldæans under the Patriarch of Mosul, who are practically Roman Catholics in doctrine, with a divergence of opinion regarding the infallibility of the Pope and his right to interfere with their concerns.

The larger portion of the Nestorians in Persian territory come under the first of these headings, and are followers of Mar Shimun, the present Patriarch, who appears to be an astute old gentleman, subsidised

by the Turks, and no doubt on some understanding with Russia. Meanwhile other factors are at work, and missions of the American Episcopalian Church, the Church of England, and the Roman Catholics are after them,—a combination that has unfortunately caused some friction, though not as much as might have been expected. The efforts of these three missions have done much for the education, and particularly the technical education, of the people, and many converts have been made by each of the sects in question. Yet in spite of this success, the moral standard of the Nestorians and their Church is still hopelessly low, and little or no raising of the people has been generally brought about. The characteristics of the Nestorians are easily summed up. They are extremely religious in form, keeping most strictly the Sabbath, their fast-days, &c.; still more extremely immoral in domestic life; and hopelessly mendicant and avaricious. In fact their craving for education may be said entirely to exist for the purpose of being able to better their worldly affairs, and even to prey upon their less fortunate brethren.

While the Catholic and American Missions are intent upon making converts, that of the Church of England is carried out on much wider and broader principles—merely the moral raising of the people and the setting of an old Church upon its feet again.

Now and again—generally in regard to the Armenian question—the oppression of the Nestorians is brought before the public; but, as a matter of fact, very little exists, and their position in Persia at least is better than that of the lower-class Moslem population. The wilder mountain Nestorians boast to-day that they pay no taxes, and are fully armed to repel either the Kurds or the official tax-collector. In fact, between the lawlessness of this wilder division of their people and the Kurds there is little to choose, as both are robbers and brigands, and independent.

These few words about the remnants of an ancient and once powerful division of the Christian religion will suffice for a book the object of which is simply the narration of travel.

I failed to procure any antiquities of any value at Maragha. One or two moderate sword-blades and some Greek coins, for which the most exorbitant prices were asked, were brought to me, and the owners seemed quite surprised and annoyed that I was not prepared to give ten times the value of the articles in question.

Certainly the principal charm of Maragha is owing to its delightful surroundings of gardens; for the valley, wide as it is, is literally covered with an abundance of fruit, walnut, and poplar trees, while

every stream is shaded by the willow and the sweet-smelling jujube-tree, with its soft yellow blossoms; and in these groves we spent the cool of the afternoon, after having exhausted the few sights of the little town. Our walk would have been pleasanter certainly had we been able to free ourselves of the dozen or so Armenian boys who followed us about begging for money, though all well dressed, and offering to show us all sorts of imaginary ruins and curiosities for "a consideration." But Mohammed, my Arab servant, proved too much for their never-ceasing demands at last, and, with the aid of a *chapar*-whip and a few well-directed stones, dispersed the crowd and rid us of the annoying attention of these detestably grasping urchins.

Then back to our caravanserai to feed our horses and sketch the old part of the building, where a caravan of gaudy Kurds had arrived, who, unlike the Turki population, treated us with no concern except to wish us a hearty good evening. But the Turkis — shopkeepers and caravan-men — who frequented the khan, refused to aid us in any way to water, feed, or tether our steeds, or put their hands to any work, until the wild country Kurds came to our rescue and helped us to see to our horses' needs and comforts—no easy task in the crowded yard of a caravanserai, in a country where every horse fights























and kicks at everything and everybody within reach of his heels.

We left Maragha at dawn the next day, passing down a wide road planted with an avenue of trees, and faced at one end by a rather handsome mosque of brick. Then on along a level track with walled gardens of poplars and fruit-trees, amongst vineyards and almond-plantations, until, an hour after leaving the town, we reached a brick bridge near the village of Khamiat. So rough and slippery looked its pavement of blocks of stone that we preferred to ford the stream, which, being low, offered no difficulties.

The horses of Northern Persia—and I daresay those too of other parts of the country—are trained to amble, by which a steady pace of about four to five miles an hour can be maintained on good roads and level country. The motion is a pleasant one, and not in the least tiring, as is the uncertain and little-practised trot of these country steeds. In the early morning, before the heat of the day, we sped along at an excellent rate, enjoying the freshness of the breeze and the charming surroundings.

Here, too, we began to find ourselves amongst new scenes and new experiences. Everywhere the land was cultivated and green with the young corn, except where away to our left rose the snow-peaks of Mount Sahend. It was here for the first time that we



witnessed the strange spectacle of the nomad population of Northern Persia, the Iliyats, changing from their winter to their summer quarters, for such is not the practice of the Kurds alone. There were perhaps in this first cavalcade that we met a hundred men, women, and children, and it is impossible to say how large a number of camels, mares, horses, donkeys, sheep, cattle, and goats. The procession must have been at least a mile in length, for to move so large a number of beasts, and see that they did not trespass to any great extent into the adjacent fields, necessitates no little manœuvring. Probably the people themselves had but little idea of what a picture they and their belongings formed. Some of the men were riding the lumbering baggage-camels, swaying backwards and forwards to the step of their awkward mounts. They were typical Turkis of the wilds of North-West Persia, with blue cotton frocked and skirted coats, dirty wide trousers of white linen, sleeveless sheepskin jackets, and gigantic mushroom-like hats of coarse wool of brown and grey. The women and children for the most part walked, and a bright addition the former made to the scene in their skirts of dark blue or red cotton, and their gaudy shapeless jackets and bright head-gear. Some carried their young children in their arms, while the remainder of the rising generation trotted along, play-

ing with the savage-looking dogs that would stop to bark at us as we passed. The long-necked camels, gay with scarlet and embroidered head-stalls and tassels, the whole decorated with shells and little mirrors, clanged the big brass bells that were tied round their necks, groaning under the heavy load of brown and black goat's-hair tents, the summer residences—and often the winter ones too—of these wild tribes-people. Nor were the camels and donkeys the only beasts of burden; for many a bullock and cow bore in coarse bags over its back a load of the household cooking utensils, poles for the tents, and all kinds of odds and ends, now and again a young lamb or kid bleating for its mother, or a little child in bead-bedecked cap of scarlet cloth. Few were armed beyond the dagger worn in the sash or belt, but one or two carried European-made rifles or an old flintlock or primeval muzzle-loader. A couple of mollahs, distinguishable by their fur-lined caps of cloth, accompanied the rest. And amidst this strange cavalcade were thousands of sheep and goats, bleating as they went, and kicking up the dust on the way.

Regarding the movements of these Iliyats, or nomad tribes, a word or two must be written. There are said to exist in Persia seventeen distinct tribes which come under this category, each speaking

a dialect of its own. The most of them have their regular winter and summer quarters, the former known as “ Kishlak,” and the latter as “ Yailak.” Although they pay a varying tax to the Shah, the Government interferes very little in their tribal affairs, all matters being in the hands of Rish-Sufeds—grey-beards—i.e., elders. The various tribes seldom intermarry with each other. Regular customs are in use regarding the striking of their camps. They leave their winter quarters regularly one month after Nao Roz (when the sun enters Aries), and seek the Sar-hadd, or boundary of heat and cold, usually situated half-way up the mountain, on the summit of which their summer grazing-lands lie. Here they remain a month or more, proceeding, as soon as the weather permits, to the Yailak, where they remain until driven back to the Kishlak by the early snows of winter.

Two hours from Maragha we crossed the watershed of two of the rivers flowing from Sahend to Lake Urmiyah, the Safi Chai and the Murdi Chai. We followed a stream to its junction with the latter, just where it emerges from the valley and its gardens and enters the plain. This was a charming spot, green with damp sward and trees, and even young plantations of poplars, no doubt planted for building purposes. Just below where we forded the river is a

fine red-brick bridge, but as we were shown a shorter cut, and the water was low, we preferred to ford and give our horses the opportunity of drinking. Half a mile beyond the river we reached the large village of Kalajéh, and as we had covered over fifteen miles in three hours, and my horses had a matter of a thousand miles more or less of travel before them, I thought it advisable to rest here. There is no caravanserai at Kalajéh, and so we were obliged to search for lodging in a private house—no very easy matter, as all the men of the place seemed to be absent working in the fields. However, after half an hour of aimless marching up and down the streets between mud hovels, we happily fell in with the guardian of an official house, on which I had already set my eyes with envy, and before long, by the aid of a little politeness and a small gift, we found ourselves comfortably installed in a charming little residence, situated in an overgrown garden of fruit-trees. Our house consisted of a suite of large apartments on the ground floor, minus their windows and doors, and two pleasant little rooms above, with prettily latticed windows, consisting of small pieces of wood arranged to form the geometric design so popular in the East. Here we unpacked our saddle-bags, and arranging for our meals to be sent to us from a neighbouring house, settled ourselves in. Excellent stabling existed in

the yard without, and we were really fortunate in finding so comfortable a lodging.

The view from the window of the upper room was charming. One's eyes wandered a mile or two across the plain, over a foreground of flat yellow mud roofs, to the hills and gardens near the bridge where we had forded the Murdi Chai. A few words must be written about the usual habitation of the Turki peasants of Azerbaijan. They consist entirely of mud, except for the poplar poles that support the roof. Usually entrance to the dwelling is gained through a yard surrounded by a high rough mud wall, in which the cattle are housed of a night. Within, one or more rooms open on to the yard. These chambers are not usually lit by windows, and are very dirty, with low ceilings, and black with smoke. Little or no furniture or comfort of any sort is to be found within. A hole in the centre of the floor, kept covered by a wooden plank, or often forming a dangerous trap by being hidden under matting only, serves in the cold winter as a fireplace. Often a rough handloom and a few coarse boxes are all the rooms contain, though now and then a cradle and a carpet are found. A few coarse copper pots and pans suffice for cooking utensils and for milk, on which latter the natives largely subsist. In one corner stands a cane framework covered with mud, like an

enormous beehive in shape, in which the grain is stored for the year's use. Unattractive and full of vermin are these hovels in Persia; but for the traveller who, like myself, prefers to see native life as it is, and to travel unhampered by tents or baggage, there is generally no other accommodation. So it was that at Kalajéh we had every reason for being highly satisfied with our quarters, which were clean and fresh, and open to the breeze.

Nor were we fated to pass our afternoon without incident; for first we were visited by a Turki musician, a wild hunchbacked creature in rags, with long straight hair hanging on his shoulders, and a tambourine three sizes too big for him. As far as playing this simple instrument can be said to be artistic, he excelled, and it was really marvellous the extraordinary facility of moving his fingers that constant practice had given him; but any merit his skill on the tambourine possessed was cancelled by his rasping voice, which grated in a key he failed to reach, rising every now and then to a broken chromatic scale and dying away in a squeak. As his airs were all love-songs of the ultra-pathetic type, the effect of the words was lost; nor did I dream that he was singing anything but vastly comic songs, mixed up with bad imitations of the "Battle of Prague," until Yusef commenced to

translate his pathetic words to me—all about bulbuls and roses and the moon, and a lot of other reiterated sentimentality.

Our second event was the arrival of a small Persian functionary from Maragha on his way to “try” some murder case in the neighbourhood. A band of soldiers preceded him, who with no compunction entered my room and roughly ordered me to quit, as a man vastly my superior required the accommodation. I was equally ready to bid them to quit; and though Yusef—an awful coward—almost screamed with terror in the corner of the room, my Arab and I had them out and down the narrow stairs in double-quick time. They literally fled when Mohammed let loose a little gentle Arabic and a couple of sturdy fists. My victory was too temporary not to follow it up, so I appeared two minutes later in the yard, shouting for my horse to be saddled. The soldiers had by now become thoroughly frightened; for molesting Europeans is a serious offence in Persia, and my piece of bluff answered well. “Where was I going?” they asked. “To meet the official on the road and complain of their ruffianly conduct.” I soon allowed myself to be pacified, and the soldiers did not know how to be polite enough,—they groomed my horses, brushed my saddles, cooked tea for me, and invited me to supper; and so

the incident passed over. The deputy governor of Maragha arrived; we exchanged visits and drank tea and sherbet with each other, supped in his apartments down-stairs, and parted the best of friends—but I didn't give up my rooms.

We heard many complaints at Kalajéh of the misery brought upon the place by the Kurdish rebellion under Sheikh Obeidullah in 1880. Of this event I shall have more to say anon; and whether it was owing to that or to other sources, certainly the large village wore a most poverty-stricken appearance, quite unaccountable to natural circumstances, for the country round is very fertile and rich. Most of the windows and doors of the house I was in had been burnt as firewood by the wild Kurdish tribes.

Rain fell in the night, and a cloudy morning made travelling delightful, though our road was in places abominable—through a deep sticky marsh of black peat—and our horses were often up to their girths in slime and water. However, with patience we managed to pull through and reach better ground beyond.

We were still traversing the succession of wide valleys and plains that line the east bank of Lake Urmiah, and our elevation above the sea had altered but little, as I found the barometer at Kalajéh to



stand at 4250 feet—that is to say, about 200 feet above the level of the lake, which from this spot was not visible, though the snow-peaks beyond showed up every now and again white against the blue sky.

After spluttering about in the marsh, and not without a few falls, for the mud was the most slippery I had ever come across, we reached grass again, and clearing the soil from our horses' shoes, we trotted on over the undulating plain, dotted with villages and gardens. A succession of deep narrow canals for irrigating purposes caused us no little delay, for there was no one near to show us the fords; but at length the vision of a wide fast-flowing river, with large gardens beyond and here and there the peep of a house, showed us that we were nearing Miyandob.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## MIYANDOB TO SUJ-BULAK.

AT the banks of the Jiratu, or Jirati, as it seems to be more often called, we were obliged to wait our turn to be carried across by the boat which answers the purpose of a ferry. This short delay, however, did not inconvenience one in the least, for there was plenty to see the while. A cavalcade of the Iliyat population were crossing at the time, and the boat was full of gaily-dressed women and children, of whom, too, a great number, together with men, cattle, camels, and horses, had already been ferried across. On the bank they had, while waiting for the rest of their gipsy relations, pitched their brown goat's-hair tents and lit their fires, and the cooking of the mid-day meal was in full swing. A prettier or more picturesque scene could not be imagined in the bright sunlight on the green river-bank. The cattle, camels, and horses browsed and grazed amongst the tents,

while many of the smaller children, to prevent their straying or falling down the steep clay banks into the river, were tethered, together with the lambs and kids, to the tent poles. Every one was active, save only the shepherd-boys who guarded the great flocks and herds that stood panting in the heat. For a background to this panorama of human beings, tents, fires, and kind, lay the river, and beyond the gardens of Miyandob and the hills farther away. But it was not long before it came to our turn to cross, for the Iliyats were coming from the farther shore, and the boat had to return empty. With a great deal of shouting and laughter, and no little danger from being kicked, we jumped our horses into the three-cornered boat of rough planks and set out. Before, however, we reached the farther bank we were nearly being capsized ; for with that want of forethought which fighting horses always show as to situation and danger, a wild battle-royal commenced in the frail craft between my three steeds. Our fellow-passengers, some women and children, began to scream, and for a moment or two affairs looked very serious ; for we were rocking like a steamer in mid-ocean, and the current was whirling us down-stream the while. However, Mohammed and I managed to mount our horses, and from the elevated position of our saddles to keep them quiet, a state we could not have other-

wise brought them to, mixed up as we were with the dozen or so other passengers who crowded the frail craft. As it was, the third horse jumped overboard before we reached the bank and swam ashore, to be soon caught by the skilful Iliyat Turkis, who are masters of horsecraft, like their near relations the Turkmans. A wild lot these men were, armed with daggers, blunderbusses, pistols, and as often as not European manufactured rifles. Half an hour of crossing canals and threading our way between gardens and we entered Miyandob at noon on May 16.

Our road from Tabriz to this spot, with the exception of turning aside to visit Maragha, had been nearly north and south; but at this point we had reached the south-east corner of Lake Urmiyah, which was distant about twenty miles, and were now to turn more to the west, in order to pursue our route toward Kurdistan and the Perso-Turkish frontier.

Miyandob may once have been a flourishing place, but to-day it is more than half in ruins. The rebellion of the Kurds and their invasion of this portion of Azerbaijan wrought such havoc in the place that it will take years before it can regain its former importance. Nor, for the matter of that, is it ever likely to do so under Persian rule; for decay has set its seal upon everything in that benighted country, and while a thousand towns are sinking into poverty and obli-

vion, scarcely one is rising in importance or wealth. We wandered about the deserted streets—for such of the inhabitants as were not at work in the fields or the gardens had sought the coolness of their houses from the burning sun—before we could obtain quarters. Fortune, however, again favoured us in the end, and a lodging for our few hours' stay was offered by a handsome young member of the Ali Illahi sect, who had at one time been in the service of the Imperial Bank of Persia at Tehran. A cool room, plentiful bowls of curdled milk and buffalo cream, and trays of food, were soon brought, and we rested for three hours stretched upon clean carpets and pillows. The room in the house put at our disposal much resembled all those I saw in Northern Persia. It was of some size and oblong, a large and decorative window filling up almost the whole of one of its ends; the other three walls contained two tiers of the square niches answering to cupboards, which one finds all over the country. A rough fireplace with an open grate stood in the centre of the wall opposite the window. Kurdistan rugs, one or two of by no means poor design or manufacture, covered the floor, and mattresses and pillows lined the walls. Leading out of the room in which we were was a second, rougher in build and unwhitewashed, where the women of the household congregated, and which served also as a kitchen and

nursery. The ladies of his family did not cover their faces within doors, but brought us in our food on great copper trays, exhibiting such charms as they possessed. One or two showed some signs of beauty, but a general effect of untidiness and want of soap detracted much from their personal appearance. All wore necklaces of coral, amber, and silver, and the jackets of one or two were sewn with silver buttons and coins.

While our horses were being saddled for our departure I visited the covered bazaar, but there was little of any interest to be seen. Then presenting my hosts with a small present of money, enough to cover their expenses and a little over, we started once more on our journey.

A few words must be said about the Kurdish invasion under Sheikh Obeidullah, which wrought such havoc not only in Miyandob, but in other parts of the country surrounding Lake Urmiyah also. The leader of this rebellion was the son of a certain Sheikh Tahar, who was a noted chief in one of the mountain districts near Lake Van in Turkish territory. The father having died, the son, on account of his powerful personal character, obtained a great reputation for sanctity and political work, and entertained in magnificent style in his mountain home. Eventually in 1880 he and his

horde crossed the frontier and seized both Suj-bulak and Maragha. At Suj-bulak the inhabitants were Kurds themselves, and accordingly suffered but little, but unhappy Miyandob lost some 3000 inhabitants in a terrible massacre. The population of Maragha, taking warning, fled. Urmi, on the western side of the lake, was also besieged, but spared by the exertions, it is said, of the three or four European missionaries who happened to be there at the time, and whose influence with the Kurds was evidently of good account. But the intertribal jealousy of the Kurdish chiefs and their followers began to tell, and when Tabriz—their objective—was in sight, they fell away and dispersed, much to the delight of the Shah, who nearly lost his rich province of Azerbaijan and its capital. The leader, eventually arrested by the Turks, died in Mecca three years later. Never did the administrative rottenness or the cowardice of the Persian and Turki population show up worse. The people fled without striking a blow, and there is little doubt that had Sheikh Obeidullah continued his march into Tabriz, the city would have surrendered without a blow and the inhabitants fled, leaving an easy and rich loot to the mountaineers.

It was still early in the afternoon, and the sun was very hot, when we left Miyandob to continue

our journey. Proceeding through gardens rich in vines and fruit-trees and poplars, we entered the open plain, and shortly afterwards crossed the Taitaivi Chai by a handsome brick bridge, decorated with the domed pillars so common in Persian architecture. Near this spot we came across one of those sad scenes which are so common in Eastern countries—a forlorn little hovel all alone in the plain, the home of the local lepers. Poor creatures, such as could run or walk hurried down to the track, crying for alms, and exhibiting their sufferings and sores to our gaze. Banished from the towns and villages, the lepers take up their abode in the vicinity of the main roads, where they build themselves these little huts and beg their living, suffering greatly from the summer heat and the intense cold and snows of winter. Then on again across the plain, which is here very extensive, until the foothills were reached; and ascending amongst green corn-fields, we reached the dozen or so miserable half-excavated and half-built hovels which form the village of Amirabad. It was no promising spot to spend the night in; but sunset was near, and we could proceed with safety no farther, and the natives were cheery and ready enough to do their best for us.

Here for the first time we came across the Kurds.



I had seen, it is true, perhaps half-a-dozen shy-looking members of this race in Tabriz, but in Amirabad the entire population consisted of them. A wild dirty lot they were too, veritable savages in appearance; but their position at Amirabad renders them an easy prey to the tax-collector, and thus they accounted for their condition. On my telling them that they were the first Kurds I had seen, and that I was on my way to travel amongst their tribes, they replied that I must not judge of the race from them; that they were poor and down-trodden and oppressed, but that I should see the real Kurds in the mountains near the frontier: and so it was.

But in spite of the poverty and dirt in which these wild people lived, they were untiring in their hospitality, and quarters were soon prepared for me in one of the houses. It was a poor enough place, the whole dwelling,—shared by three generations and all the cattle,—consisting merely of a stable-like apartment, more dug out of the earth than raised above its surface. The light was admitted by a hole in the roof, and there was just sufficient of it to illumine the grimy blackness of one's surroundings—two babies tied into primitive cradles, and a fowl sitting on her eggs in the farther corner. A piece of clean matting was spread for me against the farther wall, and a

candle I had in my saddle-bags stuck to a stone and lit. Vermin there were in plenty, though only fleas, but of them myriads. The family consisted of an elderly father, still strong and hale, two very good-looking youths, each with a wife, and the babies of the latter; but the remainder of the village seemed to use the house as a meeting-place, and men, women, and children, to say nothing of cows and calves, kept trooping in and out. Bowls of new milk and cream were soon brought, but our hosts apologised for the absence of the rich buffalo cream we had been eating since leaving Tabriz, for in their poverty they possessed none of these beasts.

About nine o'clock a rifle was fired a few hundred yards away from the village, and suddenly the men, who had appeared to be sleeping, sprang to their feet, and by the light of my one candle dug out their rifles from under a pile of old saddles and sacking, while the women handed them belts stuffed full of cartridges. By this time a shouting had commenced outside, and a moment later my three hosts disappeared through the door, bidding me stay where I was. Yusef was praying hard, his face as white as a sheet, but neither Mohammed nor I was scared in the least, as these night alarms are almost always owing to attempted thefts of the village cattle, and end in nothing. A few stray shots were fired, the sheep that were being

stolen were recovered, and the night passed without more ado.

The Kurdish women at Amirabad, though living in a district inhabited principally by Turkis, do not cover their faces, and the wife of one of my younger hosts was possessed of remarkably good looks, a fact that her husband pointed out to me in the most naïve way. Whether it is owing to the fact that the women do not go veiled, or to some better character of the Kurds themselves, immorality scarcely exists in the country districts, where, by the by, infidelity is summarily punished by the death of the two offenders. Whatever the reason may be, I found no unwarrantable restraint exercised by the Kurds over their womenfolk, and both the husbands and the ladies in question seemed much to appreciate the inane compliments I soon learned to shower upon their good looks. Whatever may be the result of this trust in their womankind to the natives themselves, it is certainly an attraction to the traveller, for one mixes more freely with people. Were this not the case, one would be prevented from finding quarters anywhere, as most of the houses consist of only one room.

We were off early, the thanks and blessings of my hosts following me as we rode away into the grey dawn. Our road lay over undulating hills for an hour or so, and then across a wide open valley in

which are one or two rock-hewn tombs, until, crossing a spur, we looked down upon the rich plain of the valley of the Sanak, with its large Kurdish villages and gardens and corn-fields, a charming scene upon this bright May morning. Crossing a spur of a hill on the east side of the valley, Suj-bulak, the Kurdish town, came into view, lying along the edge of the river on a slight hill, and half hidden by the gardens that almost surround it. All around rise the mountains, green with grass, while to the west the horizon is bounded by jagged peaks of rock and snow—in all a charming scene.

We had now entered Kurdish lands, and from henceforth for some weeks we were to see few or no other people than members of these wild tribes, of which so little is known.

Continuing up the valley, on its east side, we passed over the graveyard of the town, and a few minutes later found ourselves within its walls, amongst a people differing entirely from any we had seen as yet. That short journey of not much over twenty miles between Miyandob and Suj-bulak had sufficed to bring us, as it were, into a new world, so great is the transition from the Turki population to the Kurds. With many a good day wished us as we rode down the streets of the town, and more than one Kurd ready to direct us to the best cara-

vanseraï, we proceeded to the khan in question, where with every sign of welcome and politeness I was requested to dismount and rest, while a couple of the towns-people held my horse, and another brought us a bowl of sherbet with a sort of apology of "thinking we must be hot." And this kindness we were to find everywhere throughout our travels amongst this charming and hospitable race of people. In the parts inhabited by Turkis our presence had caused no feeling beyond the possibility of extracting money, but here real kindness was shown, and we were never pestered for alms or gifts. The owner of the caravanseraï soon arrived, rooms were swept for us on the first floor, leading on to a little gallery that surrounded the building, and bowls of cool curdled milk, and sherbet, and a tray of bread brought for our refreshment.

Such were my first experiences of the Kurds.

## CHAPTER IX.

## PERSIAN KURDISTAN AND ITS INHABITANTS.

PERSIAN KURDISTAN may be said to extend between lat.  $38^{\circ}$  N. and lat.  $34^{\circ}$  N., and from the Turkish frontier on the west to a straight line drawn from Suj-bulak to half-way between Kermanshah and Hamadan on the east, though the Persians themselves do not make this geographical distinction between the country inhabited by Kurds and that of the Persian Turki tribes. In the eyes of the native Government Kurdistan is divided up between two provinces, Azerbaijan and Ardelan, and, if Kermanshah may be called a province of itself, there is a third. But from a racial point of view the rough-and-ready boundary I have mentioned above practically divides the Kurds—with the exception of the migrated tribes in Khorassan—from the other peoples of Persia.

These lines leave a space some 300 miles in length,

and averaging perhaps 160 miles in width. It is true that to the north of the Lake of Urmiyah the mountains near the frontier are largely inhabited by Kurds ; but they share these fastnesses with Turkis, and more especially the hill Nestorians, and are not by any means sole masters of the soil, as they are with but little exception in the country which I have called Persian Kurdistan more to the south.

The principal physical features of their territory are—(1) Lake Urmiyah, of which enough has already been said ; (2) the long chains of mountains on which for the most part they reside. These ranges, known to the northern parts as Kandilan and Azmir Dagħ, separate the basins of two tributaries of the Tigris, the Diala and the Zab. To the south the chain is known as Zagros, and it is through and over a pass at this portion of the range that the road from Kermanshah, and Persia in general, proceeds to Baghdad. Another spur of the same range strikes to the east at the south end of Lake Urmiyah, and continues across Northern Persia, where it is known as Elburz ; while east of Sinna, the capital of Persian Kurdistan, is Mount Elvend, another noticeable system.

The principal rivers of the country are the Kalu, which afterwards becomes the Lesser Zab, and flows

into the Tigris about half-way between Mosul and Baghdad; the Jirati, which rises in the mountains a little to the east of Bana, and flows eventually into Lake Urmiyah; the higher waters of the Diala, which spring from near Sinna and the mountains to the south of that town, uniting into one river near the Turkish frontier, and reaching the Tigris below Baghdad; and the Kizil-Uzen, which flows from the frontier hills between Sakiz and Sinna and eventually finds its way to the Caspian Sea, where it is known as the Sefid Rud.

With its rivers rising in a comparatively small space, and draining into three distinct directions, it can be easily imagined how broken up is the surface of the territory of the Persian Kurds. To the traveller the country presents a bewildering succession of ranges, the principal direction of which is N.N.W. and S.S.E.

From this short account of the geographical boundaries and features of Persian Kurdistan we may now pass on to the people themselves, and turn for a minute or two to their history and general characteristics.

Regarding the former there is a great deal of controversy, and it is unlikely that amongst a people who possess no literature any satisfactory result will ever be arrived at. Even the question of whether



they boast of Iranian or Turanian descent has never been satisfactorily settled. Some suppose that they are the descendants of the Medes, others of the Parthians, while a more favoured and more probable solution is found in tracing their descent to the Gardu or Kurdu of the Hittite times, and that they only became Aryanised as the Aryan people migrated toward their country. However, as Mr Curzon argues in his book on Persia, it is safe to grant them a respectable antiquity, for that they are the Carduchi of Xenophon who harassed and tormented the retreating Ten Thousand there can be no question. Their lot has never been a peaceful one ; for while their formation into a complex system of tribes has always, as it does to-day, withstood their ever being united into a kingdom, still their hand has been against every man's hand, and no nation that has sent its troops during many centuries of history into Asia Minor has failed to suffer from the raids of these hardy and brave mountaineers. Although the Kurds have never shone as a literary nation, several are well known to history by name ; for not only was Salah Ed - Din of the Crusades a Kurd, but also Edrisi the famous Arab geographer ; while in later days Mohammed Agha, otherwise known as "Turkchi Bilmas," at the beginning of this century, was a Turkish general, whose ability and cruelties, particularly in the Yemen, are

to-day remembered and spoken of with horror. Nor probably, were a search to be made in the histories of men who have risen to distinction in Constantinople and other parts of the Mohammedan world, would the Kurds be unrepresented. For in spite of the fact that they possess no literature and but few traditions, they are a people of quick thought and considerable wit, that need but a good Government and a system of education to bring forth their good qualities. With regard to their religion they are Sunnis—that is to say, they belong to the orthodox division of Islam, while the Persians and Turkis of Persia are almost without exception Sheiyas. Regarding the sect of the Ali Illahis I shall have a few words to say anon. Curiously, not only is this strange and as yet little known doctrine found existing amongst people who like the Kurds are Sunnis by tradition, but also is not unknown amongst the Turkis of Azerbaijan, and I came across more than one member of the Ali Illahi sect in Tabriz and several of their villages near the eastern shores of Lake Urmiah. The difference of doctrine between the Kurds and the Persians is the cause of the occasionally occurring depredations of the mountaineers on the peoples of the plains; and to-day there can still be seen, as in the districts of Solduz and Miyandob, the never repaired devastation wrought by their hands.

With regard to the language of the Kurds, Ker-  
manji is the name given to their tongue, which,  
though it differs in dialect, is practically comprehen-  
sible to all the tribes alike, with the exception, the  
Kurds themselves informed me, of a variation of the  
language spoken by the Zarzar tribe near Urmi, which  
is quite incomprehensible to the people of Serdasht  
and Bana, for instance. In the province of Ardelan,  
to the south of Azerbaijan, the Guran dialect of Ker-  
manji is spoken, which appears to be a relic of the  
older and purer tongue, though much more adulter-  
ated with Persian; and on the frontier of the Arab-  
speaking tribes, near Zagros, I found that a still more  
impure dialect was used, containing as well as Persian  
many Arabic words and expressions.

Regarding the life led by the Kurds, the tribes  
inhabiting the Persian side of the frontier can be  
divided into two parts, and this division is recognised  
by themselves—(1) the sedentary Kurds, and (2)  
those who migrate, or rather change their quarters  
for winter and summer. The first of these two sec-  
tions are considered to be of a lower class than the  
second, and in feature and manner and garb generally  
distinguishable from their more independent brothers.  
They till the soil in the valleys, and now and again on  
the hillsides, and sow large crops of barley. Often  
these manual labourers live in a state of feudalism,

being, as it were, serfs to the richer and more aristocratic families. The shepherd class, as they call themselves, are by far the more interesting to the stranger, and the more troublesome to the Governments of the countries that attempt, never very successfully, to hold them in check. About the well-bred Kurd there is an air of conceit and self-satisfaction that is delightful. In his opinion the whole world belongs to him, and he can well afford to snap his fingers at the Shah of Persia. Rich in cattle, which his servants graze, he spends his winters in the warm houses, often more dug out of the hillside than built, on account of warmth, and his summers in his brown tents away up on the slopes and plateaux of the great mountain-chains by which his country is threaded. Of these villages, both of fixed abodes and tents, I shall be able to speak more fully anon; for every night of our stay in Kurdistan was spent at either one or the other, as in the month of May the migration is taking place, and while many of the tribesmen had already sought their summer quarters, a number yet remained in the valleys. Regarding these migrations there is but little that need be said here. These are, of course, necessitated by the climate of the country, for the terrific cold of winter and the terrible hurricanes that sweep over the mountains would render life, except in the valleys, impossible in that season; just as these same valleys in summer,

rendered swampy by the melting snows, become hot-beds of fever.

Mr Curzon, in the few pages that he gives to the Kurds, states that they are a remarkably stupid and extraordinarily ignorant race. This was scarcely my experience of them. It is true that the agricultural Kurd is little better than a working machine, and bad even at that; but I found amongst the higher class of migratory Kurds that they possessed a general knowledge of the world, and a tendency to broad views that surprised one very much. In fact the usual questions that I was asked were regarding Russia and England, especially in the former case to India, and in the latter to Transcaucasia. This, it is true, is no proof of superior understanding; for in every village in Persia, just as in England, you find some few who take a superficial interest in politics. But what did surprise me amongst the Kurds was their general knowledge of manufactures and trade, their interest in listening to accounts of places and people, and the manner in which they would spend hours discussing their religion, their manners and customs, and their country, and comparing them to my reports of other peoples. The Kurd has a prejudice against travel; nor is this difficult to understand, as he is surrounded on all sides by the two worst Governments in the world, those of Turkey and Persia, the officials of which are by no means anxious

to allow the Kurd to see more of the outside world than is necessary, nor themselves willing to show hospitality to members of tribes from whose depredations they have suffered from time immemorial. In all the time I was in Persian Kurdistan, with the exception of Sakiz and Sinna, I saw no Persians or Turkis, though there are a few at Suj-bulak, and one or two at Serdasht—and these have, in travelling to and fro for purposes of trade, to take the protection of Kurdish chiefs and form caravans sufficiently numerous to render them immune from attack. But though the Kurd is ready, no doubt, to murder and rob the Persian or Turki, his reason is more a religious one than desire of plunder alone; for the few Armenian merchants who trade with the more remote spots of Persian Kurdistan seldom meet with violence or molestation at the hands of the mountaineers. But of so long standing is the feud between Sunni and Sheiya, that neither loses an opportunity of paying off old scores on the other; and though I myself was treated with a respect and hospitality I have never seen equalled in any of my travels, my Turki servant, Yusef, was the butt of all the wit and humour of the village; while to my Moroccan Arab servant, a Sunni like themselves, they were always most polite and kind, never allowing him even to tether or feed my horses, work that was always performed by the villagers themselves, generally with

the aid of Yusef, whose painful endeavours and failures when any question of horses or saddlery was concerned, used to send the good-natured, laughter-loving Kurds into convulsions. Poor Yusef, annoyed at the good-natured chaff, dared not retaliate, as he was perpetually in fear of his life, and saw a robber in every one we met. Nor were the Kurds slow to tell him—seeing what a coward he was—that had I not been there as their guest to protect him, they would have made short work with his throat; whereupon he would grow a shade whiter still, and insist upon sleeping between Mohammed and myself.

I was able to collect during my travels what I believe to be a tolerably correct list of the Kurdish tribes in Persia. At present the most complete list existing is that given by Curzon, but in one or two cases, especially in his list of those of the Salmas plain, he is at fault, for he has included as Kurds the Turkman tribes who, after the treaty of Turkman Chai in 1828, preferred to leave their country, near Erivan, which was acquired by Russia, and settle in the government of a Moslem sovereign. Lahijan and the Salmas plain were chosen by the then Shah as a suitable place to settle these immigrants in, and accordingly much of the land in that part was divided amongst them. Though to-day in rare cases intermarrying with the Kurds, they still hold themselves much apart on account of the

religious differences between Sheiya and Sunni; for while the new arrivals professed the former doctrine, the Kurds are, with very few exceptions, all Sunnis, for in this portion of their country the Ali Illahis are rarely found. The very names of some of these tribes, which are mentioned in Curzon's work as Kurds, show their origin. For instance, Karapapak cannot be anything but Turkman. As a matter of fact, I came across members of this very tribe at Suj-bulak, and they gave me the information stated above. The remaining lists of Kurds given by Curzon correspond very much to my own, though his geographical distribution of them is scarcely satisfactory, as many tribes, either entirely or partially, are nomads; and in several parts of the country more than one tribe is found inhabiting the same district, sometimes owning alternate villages—a state of affairs that leads to considerable bloodshed and intertribal warfare. I have therefore, in the list which I have here appended, instead of attempting to give each tribe its geographical position, placed them according to their nearest centres and markets, taking the few towns of Persian Kurdistan as such. The difficulties of any other system will be apparent when it is stated that the Jaf, for instance, is a tribe belonging to Turkey, which spends its summers in the mountains near Sakiz, nearly 100 miles within the Persian frontier. In my list I have named only



such tribes as can be said to be distinctly *Persian* Kurds, although in many cases on the frontier they cross from side to side.

The subjoined list I took every care to compile and correct at almost every spot I rested at, and have little doubt of its being, on the whole, accurate.

A LIST OF THE KURDISH TRIBES IN PERSIAN KURDISTAN.

*In the vicinity of Sina.*

Telaku.	Manūmi.	Shamsuri.	Jafakobadi.
Beliloan.	Perpashai.	Sheikh Ismail.	Braz.
Galbari.	Lali.	Gurgēi.	Sagaru.
Kumassi.	Zan.	Duraji.	Sagwan.
Orami.	Meraki.	Petiariwan.	Lakh.
Merivan.	Burakaïi.	Khoileshkari.	

*In the vicinity of Bana.*

Tarjani.	Dashtatāli.	Ikhtiari Dini.	[Huseyn Beg].
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*In the vicinity of Sakiz.*

Horhora.

Eldi.

The Jaf and many other Turkish Kurd tribes come almost to Sakiz to graze their flocks and herds in summer.

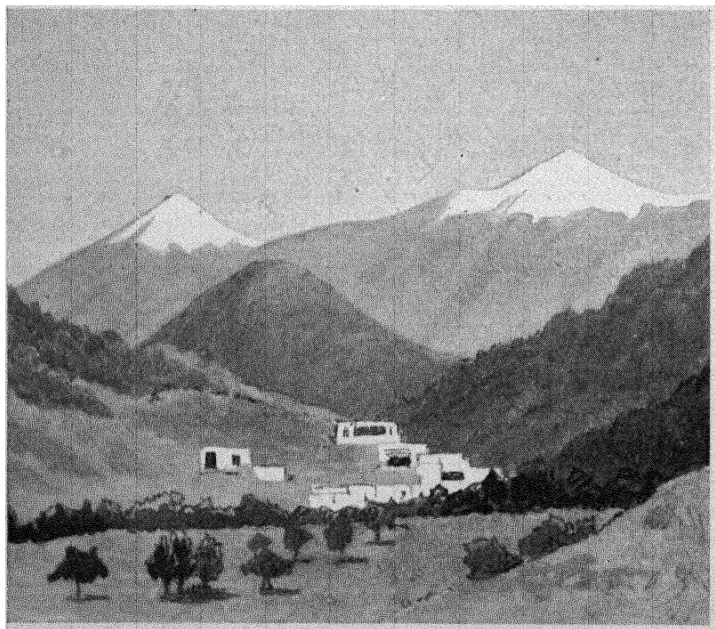
*In the vicinity of Suj-bulak.*

Mangur.	Malkēri.	Allani Dulikan.	Kaluïi.
Govrik.	Darmaï.	Baski Kolastan.	

I do not think it necessary to add here any further notes to these brief remarks on the Persian Kurds, but to leave such traits of character, &c., as struck me on my journey to appear in the narration of my travels; for as often as not, in a country split up

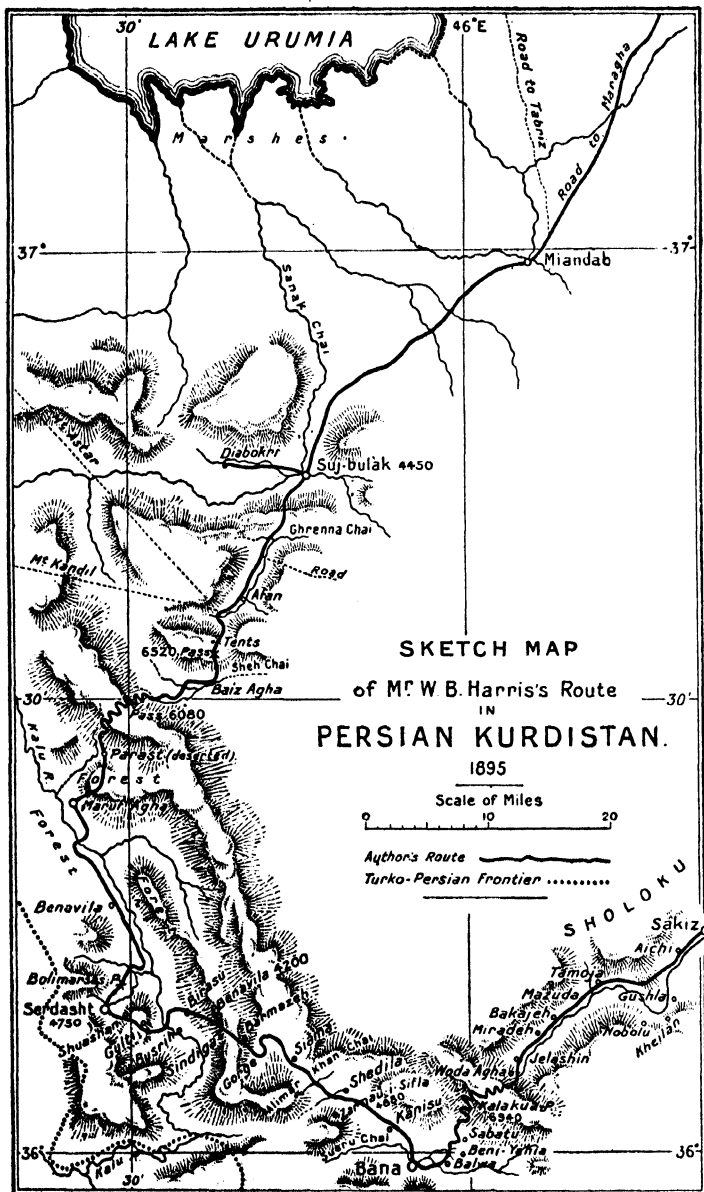
as this is into tribal districts not unseldom at war with one another, and where accordingly intercourse is not frequent, character or custom noticed at one particular spot fails to be applicable to the entire country.

With this short description of the people and the country we were now entering, a return may be made to where the story of my travels was interrupted at the end of the last chapter.



*Village of Zarnau, Kurdistan.*





## CHAPTER X.

## TRAVELS IN PERSIAN KURDISTAN.

AFTER resting we set out for a walk through Suj-bulak, up and down the cool arched arcades of the bazaars, amongst a crowd of wild mountaineers, armed to the teeth, who made way for one to pass in true politeness, and never breathed a word of insult or scorn such as meet one's ears at every turn in Tabriz, —and doubtless many of these same hillsmen had never seen a European before, for none reside in Suj-bulak, or anywhere, for the matter of that, in Persian Kurdistan, and the travellers who seek this out-of-the-way corner of the world are very few and far between.

But before proceeding further with the narrative of my travels in Kurdistan, I must give some description of what a Kurd is like. In colour they are usually no darker, and often not nearly so dark, as southern Europeans. The eyebrows and lashes and

eyes are generally black, the nose aquiline and fine, and the mouth well formed. The face is long and oval, while in stature a medium height seems to be general. The chin is shaved, the moustache alone



*Kurd of Suj-bulak.*

being left, and over it no end of trouble is taken with comb and wax. The hair is usually shaved along the top of the crown, but left long on either side, though little or nothing of it is visible owing to the peculiar and characteristic manner in which the men deck their heads. Altogether the Kurdish hillsman has a refined and somewhat

delicate appearance, were it not for the flash of his dark eyes and his quick movements, which speak at once of pluck and spirit. In dress the Kurd resembles no other tribesman I have ever come across. His costume is distinctly his own, and except in the south,

where he has come more or less under Persian influence, he never abandons it. To begin with the head-dress. A high silk pointed cap crowns the head, round which is woven a number of silk scarves and handkerchiefs in skilfully arranged disorder. The favourite colours for these turbans are dark claret and gold, with here and there a narrow stripe of some brilliant hue. The rough fringes are left hanging down, as often as not covering the eyes and ears of the wearer, and adding not a little to his fantastic appearance. Over a white linen shirt, with sleeves that end in points fully a yard long, so that they touch the ground, a silk coat is worn, crushed strawberry being the favourite colour, though cherry colour and white satin were almost equally common: these coats are made collarless and open at the neck, and fold across the breast, being held in place by a wide silk sash skilfully folded and intertwined. In this sash the long pipe and curved dagger are thrust. Over this silk coat again is worn a short sleeveless jacket of thick black, white, or brown felt, open down the front. So thick is this material that it will not fold, and where the joins are in the sewing, the stuff is cut and fastened together by long open stitches, the appearance when worn being like plates of armour, and as such it is no doubt intended. From under the silk coat, which reaches nearly to

the knees, protrude the trousers of white linen, enormously loose and baggy, but drawn in tight at the ankle. Socks of skilfully woven coloured wools appear above the pointed and turned-up slippers of red leather or embroidered cloth. With a costume as brilliant in colour and as diverse as this, it can little be wondered that a body of Kurds of the better class, on horseback or on foot, form a striking and handsome picture.

The peasant's dress is much the same, only his jacket of felt is worn usually over the linen shirt, and his trousers are of fine home-woven goat's hair.

I was not long before I called upon the Vali of the town with a request for a guide to proceed with me towards the Turkish frontier, a demand that was immediately refused. I had no authority, he said, to travel in Persian Kurdistan, and I must return the way I came. This of course I had no intention of doing, and having made my purpose known to him, bowed myself out. It was not long either before a guide was forthcoming in the person of the wildest ruffian that man ever set his eyes on, a Karapapa Tatar whose mother was a Kurd. About 6 feet 4 inches in height, he was a remarkably handsome man, with tangled black hair that protruded in long locks from under his turban in all directions, but for ferocious appearance and mild disposition he

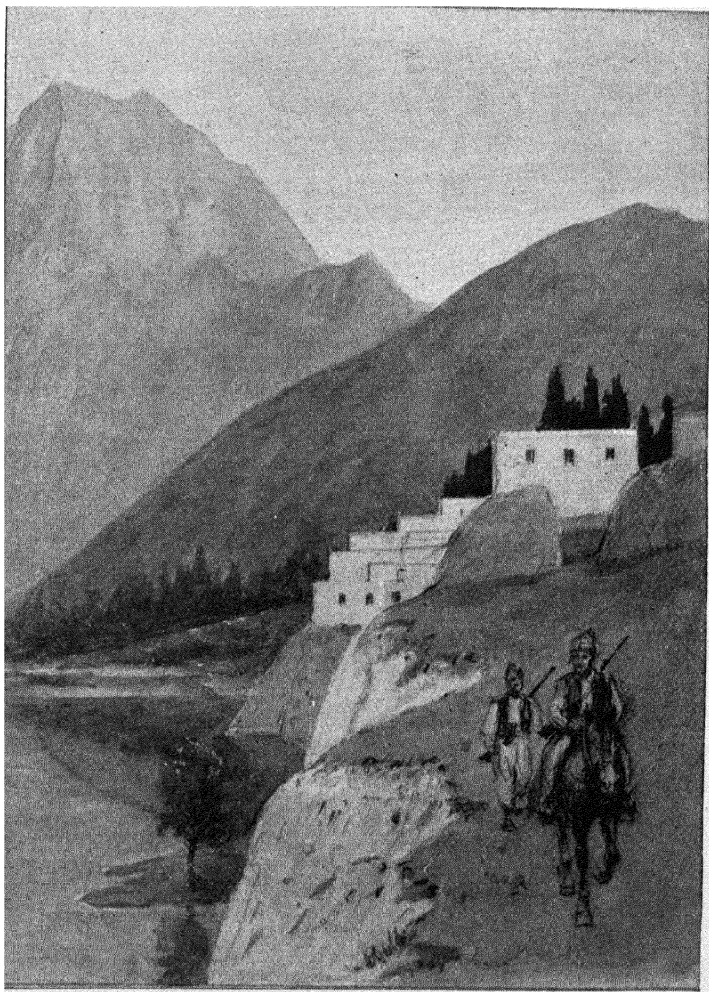


surpassed anything I ever saw. Before I had made his acquaintance a few hours he had told me all his family history. His people had come from Erivan on the conquest of southern Transcaucasia by Russia, and his tribe had been magnanimously settled by the Shah on some one else's land at the south end of Lake Urmiah. Then he continued his family history, till, with tears in his eyes, he rushed off to bring me his only child, a baby girl of some three years of age, to admire. A sweet pretty little thing she was, too. The sight of this veritable savage nursing the smiling child was a strange one. But he answered my purpose well, for he possessed a horse, and was only too ready for a little adventure, or failing that an outing, while the fact that he spoke both Kermanji, or Kurdish, and Turki made him doubly useful.

Under the leadership of this guide we left Sujbulak early the next afternoon, in the direction of the Turkish frontier. A stony hill crossed, we descended on the farther side to the ruins of what once must have been a fine bridge, and forded the river a few hundred yards above this spot. The road led us along the banks of the Mangur Chai, through a wide valley, wooded near the river-bed. On either side the mountains rose to a considerable elevation, in places sparsely covered with brushwood,

in others precipitous. Between the foot of these mountains and the river were fields of waving green corn, amongst which here and there appeared the black tents of the Kurds, whose flocks and herds could be seen grazing upon the steep hillsides, while along the river-bank, here in the open and there amongst trees, strayed the mares and foals. The scenery was charming; a fresh breeze cooled the sun-laden air, and the verdure of the country added not a little to increase the pleasure of our ride. But few signs of habitations were visible beyond the tents. At one spot on the right bank of the river, where the steep mountains reached almost to its banks, we passed a half-built, half-excavated collection of cave-hovels, entirely deserted now, for the inhabitants had sought, with their flocks and herds and all their worldly belongings, the open grazing-lands of the higher mountains, glimpses of which, peaks of rock and snow, we now and again obtained.

It was still early when our guide, pointing ahead to where a small tributary joined the river, told us that we must seek quarters for the night at that spot, as there were no other fixed villages that we could reach before night would be upon us, and travelling after dark in this part of the country was out of the question, as the Mangur tribe of Kurds are well known as highwaymen and robbers. So, turn-



VIEW OF SUJ-BULAK.



ing aside from the main valley, we entered a gorge to the south, at the mouth of which we met the chief man of the village, at whose house it was the Karapapa's intention to ask for lodging and shelter. Mohammed Aghá, for such was his name, was a typical Kurdish chief, decked out in all the finery with which they so love to decorate their persons. The same cleanliness of clothes and the same intentional untidiness of turban was as noticeable here as it had been in Suj-bulak. The Karapapa having made known my presence, which he galloped on ahead to do, Mohammed Aghá and his band of three or four followers turned their horses' heads in my direction, and cantered over the greensward to meet me. Ten minutes later we were passing through the streets, if such they can be called, of his village, *en route* to a large two-storeyed house that rose high above the low hovels of the place. The situation of Diabakri, for so the village is called, is picturesque but unhealthy, for it is almost entirely enclosed by high walls of rock, and this no doubt accounts for the fever from which the inhabitants suffer so largely in summer. The same politeness was noticeable here as we had seen in Suj-bulak, and as Mohammed Aghá passed in and out amongst the houses on his way to his own residence, every man rose to his feet and stood erect. Arrived at the two-storeyed gate-

way leading into the courtyard of the house, we dismounted, and while our horses were promptly led away to where water and food awaited them, Mohammed Aghá beckoned us within.

There was nothing very noticeable about the Aghá's residence, nor was it built in any degree according to the typical Kurdish style, of which I shall have more to say when narrating my travels in the more distant parts of Persian Kurdistan; suffice it to say that we were shown into a most comfortable upper room, carpeted and bedded with mattresses, where, a few minutes after our arrival, amidst a profuse declaration of welcome on the part of the Aghá and his secretary, a young Turki of Tabriz, big bowls of cool milk and cream, cheese and bread, and the paraphernalia of tea, were brought us. Meanwhile the unusual arrival of a European was causing some little stir in the village, and all the men whose position allowed of their being on terms of intimacy with their Aghá came and called, one and all welcoming me to their country. On making inquiries, I was told that, in the memory of the Aghá, who was perhaps forty to forty-five years of age, only five Europeans had visited this secluded spot. Refreshed after our ride, we sauntered out under the guidance of some of the Aghá's friends, and climbed the high hill that rises almost precipit-

ously to the south of the village. We crossed first the little stream, clear as crystal, that runs through the grove of trees opposite the Aghá's residence, and then by a mere sheep-track scrambled to the summit, some 300 or 400 feet above. Near the top is a large natural cave, into which the sheep and goats are driven in winter for protection from the cold and the wolves. From the outer hall of the cave a narrow passage, in places a yard in height, leads one by a circuitous route to a second and still larger chamber. The lights we had were dim, and one could only gain a very faint idea of the size and height of this rock chamber, but it appeared to be of very considerable dimensions. Emerging wet and muddy, we climbed to the rocky summit of the hill, and there sat down to rest and admire the surrounding scenery of gorge and mountain-top. Returning to the Aghá's house, dinner was served in great trays, bearing savoury dishes of eggs, fowl, mutton, and delicious little sauces of pickles, the whole succeeded by the bowls of cream and milk that we were now beginning to look upon as our staple article of food. The evening was passed pleasantly enough with the Aghá, his secretary, a regular Turki dandy, and one or two of the Aghá's Kurdish friends, nearly as gorgeous in appearance as himself. Until we lay down to sleep, two huge warriors guarded the door

on the inside, standing one at each lintel, rifle in hand, and begirt with many cartridge-belts ; and when at length we sought rest upon the mattresses that formed divans all round the room, these guards merely stepped without, and took up their position on the landing at the head of the stairs. But my evening brought me disappointment in one respect, in that Mohammed Aghá advised me very strongly to abandon my journey toward the Turkish frontier in that direction, as the Mangur tribe were at war amongst themselves, and I should find not only the villages empty of men, but also very probably armed bands of lawless robbers in every direction. This advice I listened to readily enough, for not only had the Aghá no object in wishing to persuade me to turn back, but he was also, from the high position he held, thoroughly aware of what was passing near the frontier ; and his recommendation that I should skirt the southern limits of the Mangur tribelands and make for Serdasht, some three days' journey to the south, seemed in every way to be worth consideration.

To the traveller there is nothing more depressing than having to retrace his steps ; but rather than wander uselessly into dangerous country I preferred to abandon the risk, and continue my journey in the direction which Mohammed Aghá advised me



to follow. So it was that the following day I found myself once more in Suj-bulak. During the few hours' ride from Diabakri to that town I took advantage of the proximity of a large encampment of Kurds to visit their tents, in approaching which we were able to obtain evidence that the Aghá's statement as to the disturbed state of the country was not far wrong; for no sooner were we four horsemen seen cantering towards the encampment than a small commotion commenced, and from almost every one of the tents men armed to the teeth appeared, one and all busy loading their Martini rifles. However, a shout from our Karapapa friend soon put matters right, and the men who only a few minutes previously were a band of armed ruffians, on our arrival had resumed their more peaceful appearance of shepherds, and in place of rifles bowls of fresh milk and *leben* — the delicious sour milk of the country—were in their hands.

The tents of the Kurds, in which they seek the pasturage of the mountains in summer, vary very much in size, though in appearance and shape they conform throughout to one plan. The covering of the tents consists of long narrow strips of black goat's - hair material sewn together lengthways. Along the centre of the tent this roofing is supported on three to five poles according to the

size, and stretched out by ropes which, made fast to the edge of the roofing, are pegged securely to the ground. The poles within the tent being of some height, usually 8 to 10 feet, the edge of the tenting does not nearly reach the ground; but walls are formed of matting of reeds, held together by black goat's-hair thread, which is often so arranged as to form patterns on the yellow mats. Nothing could have been kinder than our reception by these wild Kurds, and it was only with difficulty that we could escape their pressing invitation to pass the remainder of the day and the night in their tents, and prevent them killing a sheep in our honour. Although in the streets of Suj-bulak we had seen a number of Kurdish women, it was here that we first came across them in their peasant life and peasant dress; and picturesque enough they were, in spite of the fact that the proximity of the clear flowing river did not appear to tempt them to overmuch use of its water. Above the loose trousers of dark blue or red cotton they wore jackets of the same material or of cloth, richly decorated with silver buttons and coins, while most of them wore long strings of Persian silver money bound round their foreheads.

It was my object, after the result of my interview with the officials at Suj-bulak, to attract as

little attention as possible, and accordingly, under the guidance of the Karapapa, we entered the town by a back-way, and winding through a few dusty streets, with poor mud-houses on either hand, drew rein at the large wooden doorway of one of rather more promising appearance, and a minute or two later had taken up our quarters within. This custom of lodging in private houses exists all through Kurdistan, and is one that renders travelling in those parts far easier and more interesting than it would be were one to lodge in caravanserais or seek the seclusion of a tent. Certainly it has drawbacks: there is a want of privacy and no want of vermin; but taking into consideration the advantages and the disadvantages, I have no hesitation in stating that the former largely outnumber the latter. One obtains far more insight into the manners and customs and life of the people; one is able to gather a fund of information that would otherwise be lost; and all superfluous baggage is unnecessary, for the cooking will be done willingly enough by the owners of the house, while the appliances for making tea, &c., are found everywhere. We tethered our horses in the yard, and sought the seclusion of a smoke-begrimed room within, which, with the exception of its blackened walls and ceiling, was clean enough.

The family with whom we had taken up our lodging consisted of the two wives of an absent husband and his two young sons, the elder of whom, a handsome youth of some sixteen years of age, was carrying on a most reprehensible flirtation with his young stepmother, his father's lately annexed bride. It was a case of the cat being away, for the good father, trudging to Mecca on the pilgrimage, had been absent over a year and five months. It was to be our lot, however, to witness his home-coming, for about midnight a loud banging at the outer door awoke us all, and on the heavy beam which held it closed being removed, the faithful Haj appeared, travel-stained and weary. What rejoicings there were! Every one laughed and sang; only the youth and his pretty stepmother seemed disappointed, for here at last was the end of their flirtation! Dawn broke, and we seemed no nearer making a start than we had been the evening before, for no guide was forthcoming, and none of us three—Englishman, Turki, and Arab—spoke Kermanji. But it was the home-returning pilgrim who rescued us from our dilemma. In spite of the fact that for nearly a year he had been trudging overland from Mecca—he had come *viâ* Syria and Asia Minor and Mosul—he volunteered at once to guide us to Serdasht on foot, an offer I was not slow to accept. So saying farewell to

his family, with whom he had only just been reunited after nearly eighteen months' absence, he took his staff in hand, and mounting our horses we set out. I am not sure, but I rather fancy I detected a smile and a wink on the part of the younger wife, as she broke the news to her handsome young stepson. *O tempora ! O mores !*

Our road led us first along a grassy valley, watered by a tiny stream that has an almost due southerly direction from Suj-bulak, but it was not long before we had reached its higher end and were climbing the steep grassy hills beyond. A pass of 5400 feet above the sea-level was crossed, and a steep descent on the farther side brought us to the valley of the river Ghrenna, a fast-running stream flowing between hills of long grass. In spite of the want of vegetation, the scenery was by no means to be despised, for spring was at its full, and wild-flowers were in bloom everywhere—such wild-flowers as we know in England, amongst others the blue forget-me-not. Storks and sea-gulls—the latter no doubt from the salt lake of Urmiyah—sought their food on the grassy banks of the stream, and the sheep and goats that grazed, led here and there by the Kurdish children, looked fat and happy and contented. During the afternoon a solitary village was passed, deserted by its inhabitants, who had sought their summer pastures. There was

something sad and depressing about these abandoned villages of Kurdistan, and one could not help fancying that some plague or war had carried off the villagers. The manner in which the houses are left, too, adds to this impression, for the doors are wide open and the rooms bare, as if there had not been time even to close them up. Towards sunset, after ascending by a winding path the high mountains which we had seen in front of us for a long time, we drew rein at a group of shepherds' tents, at an altitude of nearly 6000 feet above the sea-level. The dozen or so tents that formed the little village were pitched in a small gorge leading into the narrow valley we were ascending, only a few hundred yards off the road. They were poor enough, these Kurds of the mountain-tops, merely the shepherds, in fact, tending the flocks of one of the rich chieftains, whose village we were to visit the following day ; but they welcomed us to such hospitality as it was in their means to show us, and led our horses down to graze at the edge of the stream, while they spread our carpets in the best of the tents. The usual milk and butter and cheese were brought, and a very small sum of money added a couple of fowls to our supper, and the evening passed pleasantly enough. The tent in which we passed the night was divided into two parts by a division of reed matting, one-half forming the living-room of the shepherd, his

wife and family, while the remainder sheltered the young lambs and kids, too young as yet to go a-grazing with their mothers. What a bleating there was as the herds and flocks were driven to the encampment for the night, and the little lambs turned out to seek their evening meal! What a searching of mothers for their young, and of the young for their mothers!

Daylight found us well on our road, ascending toward the head of the pass, where we found an altitude of over 6000 feet. From the summit an extensive panorama lay before us, range after range of mountain, green with the grass of spring, except where in places the precipices were too steep for verdure, or the snows of winter yet lay unmelted. Continuing our road along the brow of the mountain, we reached, an hour or so later, a deep gorge, by which we descended once more to lower altitudes. Very pretty and picturesque it was, with its stream of crystal water tumbling and leaping in foaming waterfalls through the midst; its banks covered with low shrubs and gorgeous wild-flowers, of which a brilliant scarlet tulip seemed almost the most common. At the foot of the gorge we reached the valley of the Sheh Chai, a considerable stream running almost east and west, amongst grassy hills, which here and there were cultivated with grain.

A mile up the valley we came across the large tent encampment of Baiz Aghá, the nephew and representative of the great Kurdish chief Gader Aghá. The Aghá had chosen a natural amphitheatre on the north bank of the river for his summer quarters, and in this, on the hillside, his tents formed a crescent, between the points of which, and in the centre, stood a tent larger and handsomer than all. Quantities of flocks and herds, cattle and mares, fed in the valley, and the encampment was bright with saddled horses and gaily-dressed Kurds. Towards this central tent we proceeded. Arrived about 100 yards away from it, a number of the Kurds, one and all with their rifles on their backs, and their waists and shoulders bedecked with cartridge-belts, hurried forward to hold our horses, and leading us toward the tent, bade us dismount. In a minute our bridles and saddlebags were off, the heavy stirrups tied up to the pommel of the saddle, and our steeds were led away to graze on the banks of the stream in the long fresh grass. With many protestations of welcome I was led into the great tent of Baiz Aghá.

Before I speak of this young chief and the other hosts who so kindly entertained me, a few words must be said as to his reception-tent. This, like all the tents of Kurdistan, consisted of the usual black woven goat's-hair material supported on high poles,



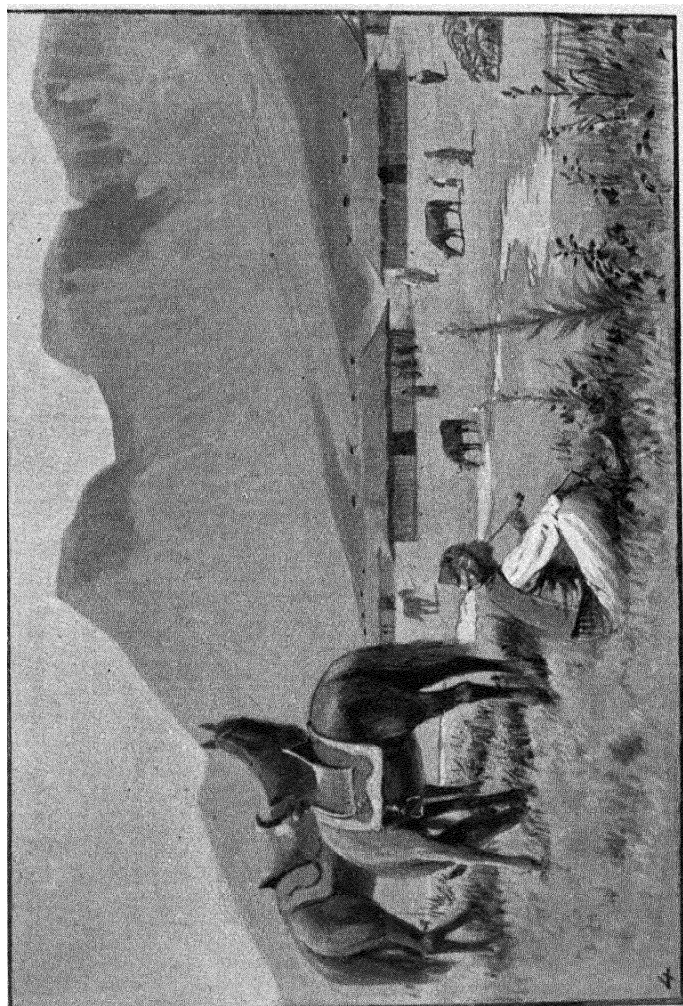
the whole surrounded with walls of canvas. In this case the tent was some 35 feet in length by 15 wide, and was carpeted all round the walls with thick brown felting and carpets. The centre was left uncovered, and here the floor consisted of beaten clay, worked almost as hard and as polished as stone, and scrupulously clean, as was everything within. In this clay floor a hole answered as a fireplace; for the nights at this altitude, even in May, are often very cold. On either side of the entrance, and just within the tent, stood guards, wild-looking Kurds in typical peasant costume, each bearing a Martini rifle, and wearing three or four cartridge-belts stuffed full of cartridges, and with the curved dagger of the country stuck in their wide sashes. But it was not these wild ruffians of tribal soldiery that attracted one's attention as one entered, for within, seated on a carpet at the right of the entrance, sat a man who, from his personal appearance and the manner in which he was dressed, made one oblivious of all else. In BaİZ Aghá, for it was he, all that was best of the Kurd was apparent. Born of the greatest of all the Kurdish families of Persia, there flows in his veins as pure a blood as could be found anywhere; and this fact is apparent the moment that one sees his face. His skin is pale and fair, a tinge of colour being just apparent on

either cheek, and the lips red. The face in form is oval and rather long, the nose slightly arched and very fine. His eyes, of deep black, point slightly up at the extremities, and are surrounded by dark eyelashes; while the eyebrows, if anything darker, are arched, and nearly meet over the nose. The mouth is delicate and rather more than ordinarily pink, the lips showing the shape of the bow. A fine, almost imperceptible, moustache shaded his upper lip. In fact, it was a face of delicate refinement, lacking if anything in manliness, though this no doubt was owing somewhat to the fact that while the majority of the Kurds who surrounded him were sunburnt, his skin showed from its delicate pink and whiteness that he seldom exposed himself to the sun. To add to his handsome appearance, he wore upon his head a tall pointed cap of canary-yellow silk woven with a gold thread, while wound round it were the many-coloured silk scarves with which the Kurds delight to decorate themselves. In his case, as generally with the better-class Kurds, these consisted of handkerchiefs of dark claret-coloured silk, with here and there a narrow strip of colour or gold. A long coat of "crushed strawberry" satin, crossed over the breast, reached to his knees, bound at the waist by a wide sash of gold and white brocade. At the neck a finely edged cambric shirt was visible, and

the sleeves of the same protruded from those of the satin coat, and hung in long points a yard or more upon the ground. In his belt were a dagger and a pipe. His legs were encased as far as the ankles in the huge baggy white trousers of the country, while his feet were bare, a pair of richly embroidered cloth slippers resting before him. Such was Baiz Aghá, a young man of perhaps five-and-twenty years of age, a chief of one of the most powerful tribes of all Persian Kurdistan. Space does not allow here of my describing the other notables by whom the Aghá was surrounded; suffice it to say that a finer, handsomer, and better ordered group I never saw. One and all were scrupulously clean; the rifles in the tent showed not a speck of rust, nor was a grain of dust appreciable anywhere.

The desire of continuing my journey with as little delay as possible made it necessary for me to refuse the Aghá's kind invitation to spend the night in his camp; so, after partaking of refreshments, and resting ourselves and our horses a couple of hours, I set out once more on the road to Serdasht. Keeping to the bank of the Sheh Chai for an hour or so, we eventually turned off to the south, and following the course of a small tributary of the river, proceeded up its course until, the stream left behind, we reached the head of the pass at an altitude of only a little under 7000 feet.

Here it was that we first caught a glimpse of wild Kurdistan, for a view lay stretched out before us than which it would be difficult to imagine anything more beautiful. From our very feet sprang up a forest of oak-trees: here clinging to the rocky peaks and precipices that surrounded us; here, farther below, rolling away in undulating curves along the lower hills that lay on each side of the river in the valley far beneath; and rocky peaks beyond. The sudden change from mountains on which little but grass existed to this rich forest-land was delightful. At our feet, far, far down below us, rolled the river Kalu, here wooded to its very banks, there turning and twisting in circuitous route amidst fields of young grain. Almost from the river-banks rose the foothills, partly swathed in forest, partly vivid green with crops or grass, but everywhere beautiful; and these foothills in turn gave place to densely wooded mountains, rising high into the clear blue sky, and ending in peaks of jagged rock and glistening snow. But it was not only the *tout ensemble* of this twenty miles or more of valley that lay before us that attracted all one's attention, for around us, peeping from the shade of the trees, were glades and flowers and flowering shrubs, pink and white and yellow with blossom. Tangled masses of roses and wild vines hung in festoons from the branches of the oaks, or trailed in jungle-like con-



KURDISH ENCAMPMENT NEAR SUJ-BULAK.



fusion along the ground. Here and there wide grassy glades opened out, sparsely wooded, and reminding one more of some grand English park than of any scenery it had ever been my lot to see. Through these woods our path led us, descending steeply the while. At one moment the view was hid by boulders of spire-like rocks or by the dense growth of trees and shrubs, the next it would open out again, and the whole expanse of forest and valley and river, with the snow-peaks beyond, burst upon one. Once or twice a small band of Kurds were passed, gorgeous in coloured raiment, covered with arms, and singing the while, wishing a hearty welcome to the first European they had ever seen, as they were constantly assuring me that I was; for we had not chosen the more regular route from Suj-bulak to Serdasht, but had, under the guidance of our cheerful Haj, come straight across the mountain-tops, and struck the valley of the Kalu some twenty miles above the spot where the caravan-route crosses that river.

Half-way down the steep mountain-side we reached the deserted village of Parast, a large enough place, but with gaping doors and windows, inhabited now by only a few stray jackals. Under a grove of trees on the right of the road lies the graveyard, with its curiously carved headstones bearing strange pictures and devices—daggers and triangles and combinations

of circles ; a few white flags on long poles waved above some more recent graves. But in spite of the fact that Parast was abandoned, and its inhabitants had sought their summer quarters, a considerable quantity of the surrounding soil was under cultivation, and a mile or two farther on we passed a picturesque little village, with a stream tumbling through its midst, and turning many a water-wheel, where these cultivators of the soil resided. It is no difficult matter to distinguish at a glance amongst the Kurds who are the cultivators and who the shepherds, for the latter are the original tribesmen, bearing themselves like the robbers and warriors they are, while a sedentary life seems to have coarsened the features of the cultivator, and his activity and spirit are lost.

At the large village of Mamazina we stopped, at the invitation of the local sheikh—Maruf Aghá—and in the wide verandah of his house drank tea, while quite a little crowd collected without to see the strange sight of a European. Of the fifteen or twenty men who rose as I entered, in the polite Kurdish fashion, and who bade me welcome, there was not one who had seen a European before.

The house of Maruf Aghá being a typical residence of this part of Kurdistan, a few words of description may not be out of place. The material used in construction was, near the ground, stone loosely cemented



by clay, while above large sun-dried mud bricks, coated without with clay, formed the walls. An excellent surface is obtained by the skilful laying on of this outer lining of much-puddled clay, and in places, such as round the windows, and in the many niches which take the place of cupboards in the rooms within, it bears a polished smooth appearance. The house was square and of one storey in height, though being built upon the slope of the hill, and the floor laid level with the highest portion of the ground, steps were necessary to reach the rooms from without at the front. The centre of this side of the house consisted of a deep verandah, with rooms at either end; a small stairway, some 3 or 4 feet in height, gave access to this verandah, which in turn opened into the rooms at either end and behind. All these rooms apparently possessed windows, though but little light was admitted, as the window-frames were carefully pasted over with paper, the substitute for glass, so necessary in the intense cold of winter. In summer the verandah, open in front to the air, seemed to be the sole part of the house in use, with the exception of a kitchen, and a room or two where the women attended to their household duties. The floor of the verandah was of puddled clay, hard and clean, and strewn with matting and rugs of thick felt. In the centre was the recess

in which the fire is lit, a few embers generally being kept red-hot for the brewing of tea in the *samovars* and the lighting of pipes. Usually only the residence of the head-man of the village possesses a verandah of such extent as that we found in the house of Maruf Aghá, which must have measured some 40 feet in length by 15 in breadth. The traveller could find no more welcome shelter anywhere than in the shade of these enclosed balconies, for the hot sun never penetrates within, the roof projecting several feet beyond the stout wooden poles that support it, and all through my travels in Kurdistan hospitality and rest were never refused by the owners of these better-class residences. The remainder of the houses of the village seldom boast such luxuries as are enumerated above, though many are of considerable size. Adjoining each is an enclosure of wattle, the fence being often 8 or 10 feet in height, into which the flocks and herds are driven of a night as protection against the wolves which abound throughout these mountain districts.

An hour or two's rest with Maruf Aghá, and we descended once again by the steep path to the valley of the Kalu below us. The snows of the mountains were fast melting at the approach of summer, and we found the wide river rushing past in a manner by no means reassuring; but quite

a number of Kurds had been sent down by their chief to help us across. These, stripped naked, seized our horses by the bridles, dragging them over to a stony island in the centre of the stream. Then began the difficult work, and one and all undressed, despatching our clothing and scanty baggage across first in charge of the vigorous mountaineers, who, by crossing three at a time, and steadying one another, were able to breast the current. Our saddles were then taken over in the same manner; and lastly, mounting our bare-backed horses, we dashed into the stream, to reach, after many a struggle and many a stumble, the other bank in safety. Mohammed, my Arab, like myself enjoyed the sport, as the naked Kurds with shouts and blows drove our horses before them, laughing and yelling the while; but Yusef, my Tabriz Turki, clung to the mane of his steed, mumbling his prayers and white with fear, as abject a picture of terror as ever I saw, and a mark for ribald sarcasm on the part of our hardy mountaineer guides. Arrived on the farther shore, we were not long in saddling our horses and dressing ourselves, and, bidding farewell to Maruf Aghá's men, we proceeded on our way.

No words of mine can describe the beauty of that afternoon's ride along the bank of the Kalu

river. The wide valley lay before us, its lower slopes here green with rising grain, there clustered with groves of trees. One minute we were proceeding through open fields, amongst hedges of roses, the next under the deep shade of forest trees, whose branches, interwoven over our heads, allowed only fitful rays of sunlight to reach the soil below. Everywhere clusters of creepers, roses, and wild-vines hung from the trunks and branches above, or trailed along the ground in dense undergrowth. Here and there the whole hillside was yellow with lemon-coloured dog-roses, or pink and white with the same sweet flowers, while every glade, every bank, was gay with a thousand blossoms. To our left, slightly below us, the river flowed, its wide open channel turning and twisting amongst green fields and groves of trees. As a background to this sylvan scene rose the mountains of dense forest, towering far into the afternoon sky, to end here in peaks of jagged precipices and rocks, there in wooded domes, and beyond in the unmelted snows of the past winter. Nor was life wanting to add a charm to the already perfect scene, for cattle lowed as they grazed on the hillsides; and the bleating of herds and flocks, and the soft pipes of the shepherd-boy, broke upon the air. Here and there a peasant was ploughing, goading on his oxen

with deep cries, which distance rendered soft and low. Birds sang everywhere, and great butterflies passed idly to and fro upon the wing—less gorgeous perhaps than the bodies of horsemen who passed us now and again, decked out in coloured silks, and their horses in tassels and cords of brilliant wools. A cheery welcome one and all had for us as they cantered past, their many belts of cartridges and the barrels of their rifles flashing in the sunlight.

Toward sunset, under the direction of the Haj from Suj-bulak, we turned aside up one of the many wooded gorges that opened into the main valley, and half an hour later were seated in the wide verandah of the mosque of Benavila, with a stream of crystal-clear water tumbling at our feet, and a view of forest and valley and mountain that it would be difficult to surpass. But what was perhaps the most enjoyable of all was the hearty reception that met us. No shyness, no holding back; a dozen men to undo our saddle-bags, a dozen more bringing fresh green grass for our horses. Trays of food and bowls of milk from this house, a big platter of bread and butter from that, and a welcome from every one—all gaiety and laughter and pleasure, for the Kurd is the happiest and most contented creature in the world, in these high mountains of Persian Kurdistan, where the Shah's rule is purely nominal, and the old tribal

system exists to-day as it did amongst the same people who held these mountains when Babylon was built. No European had ever been seen here before, though some of the villagers had seen a traveller or two at Serdasht, the little town we were on our way to visit; yet there was no curiosity, no wearying questions, though all the village, male and female, collected to look, standing open-eyed outside the rail of the balcony of the mosque while we sat chatting within to the head-men of the village. Good, cheery, handsome fellows they were, ready to answer all my questions as to their country, their ways and customs, hiding nothing, proud of their freedom, despising the Persian rule, good Moslems, but free from all fanaticism, and merry withal. When I think of the long dreary evenings I have spent after hard days of travel in other lands, I look back with unmingled pleasure and regret to those moonlit nights which I passed in the least accessible portion of Persian Kurdistan, in country that the Persian authorities had refused me permission to visit on account of its dangers!

As we were supping, the shrill sound of wooden pipes was heard, and my hosts told me that I was to witness the native dancing, a little festival having been arranged in my honour. So with a lantern we wandered to the centre of the village, where the

voices and laughter of the young men and girls told us the dance was to take place.

The performers had already drawn themselves up in line when I arrived, and a minute later the shrill notes of the pipe gave the signal for the dancing to commence. Some score of young men and women stood shoulder to shoulder, clasping hands, the line forming a crescent. At the given signal, the clapping of his hands by a youth who stood in front of the semi-circle of performers, the dance commenced, the entire line of men and women stepping slowly forward and then back again, each pace being taken a little to the right, so that a rotating movement was given to the string of dancers. As the music quickened so did the pace, and at each step the body from the waist upwards was bent forward and drawn back. Nor were the steps themselves the same, for the youth who gave the time ran up and down the line clapping his hands and singing and shouting out directions and changes. The principal feature of the dance seemed to be the bringing down of the right foot smartly upon the ground at intervals, when hand in hand the whole company remained with their bodies bent for a second or two, to spring back into position again at a fresh blow of the pipes. Meanwhile the slow rotating movement was maintained, so that the entire body were circling round the musicians. What

laughter and fun there was! Men and girls giving themselves up to the enjoyment of their national dance, which, graceful and exhilarating, bore no trace of the sensual movements which usually mark the art of dancing in the East. One cannot speak too highly of the freedom allowed to the women of Kurdistan—a freedom that seems seldom if ever to be abused, for amongst these wild mountain people the moral standard is very high; only in the towns do they seem to have sunk to the level of the Persian and the Turk. Here in these far-removed districts the old severe penalties have not disappeared, and adultery is still to-day punished by death.

An hour's ride in the early morning along the lovely valley of the Kalu until a gorge was reached, where, turning to the west, we commenced to ascend the mountains on the right bank of the river. A lovely road it was, though steep and difficult enough. Below us lay the gorge with its walls of rock and shrubs, while, wherever the soil allowed, green barley grew on the banked-up terraces, or walnut and fruit trees formed little orchards. Down the centre of the narrow valley tumbled the little stream of Boli-marsas, that gives its name to the valley itself. Above us rose the forest-covered peaks, while away behind, seen between walls of rocks and trees, lay the wide valley of the Kalu, with its background of snow-peaks beyond.



At the little village of Baskadu we rested for half an hour, for the steep climb had covered our horses with foam ; and pleasant it was under the shade of the great walnut-trees. A streamlet turned a mill near by, the monotonous sound of the wheel of which blended harmoniously with the splash of the water and the song of the birds. Everywhere the hedges were pink and yellow and white with roses, and the fruit-trees were full of bloom. Then on again, past another and larger stream, the clear shallow pools of which lay sheltered under the great trees above, until the plateau of Serdasht was reached, at an elevation of over 4700 feet above the sea-level, near the summit of the mountains that form the western side of the Kalu valley.

At first there is nothing to be seen of the little town, the plateau being apparently devoid of any houses, though the number of people moving to and fro spoke of the proximity of human habitations. It is not, in fact, until one has approached closely that one can distinguish the place ; for so low are the houses, and to such an extent are the mud roofs grown over with grass, that Serdasht, at 200 yards' distance, resembles merely a succession of green mounds. But when one has entered its few poor streets, one finds that, small as it is, the place seems a tolerably flourishing little township, with its two

squares of shops, and its Government House with its guard of soldiers. As in all the other parts of outlying Kurdistan, the officials are Kurds, for the Shah knows well enough that any attempt to force a Persian governor upon these wild hillsmen would end unsatisfactorily for himself, and still more for the governor in question, whose life would not be worth an hour or two's purchase. But the mountaineers are willing enough to be placed under the governorship of one of their hereditary Aghás, who in turn owns allegiance and pays a small sum in lieu of taxes to the imperial coffers at Tehran. No doubt the great hatred existing between the Kurds on one part and the Persians and Turkis of Persia is a religious one, for the simple Sunni creed of the former is antagonistic on every point to the Sheiya belief of the latter: and in this the Kurd is infinitely to be preferred; for while the fanatical and despicable Persian or Turki refuses even a drink of water to a European, the Kurd receives him as a fellow-man, entertains him, takes him into his house, and even puts him up in his mosques.

Quarters were soon found for me in the town, and while the room was being swept out and cleaned, and I was waiting without, I was called away to breakfast with a group of Kùrdish merchants on the little platform in front of their shops, shaded with vines and trellis. It was but one more instance of

that unbounded hospitality that is shown to the stranger throughout this delightful country.



*Kurdish Mountaineers of Serdasht.*

There is but little to see in Serdasht beyond the picturesque figures in its streets, for here the Kurd is

found at his best ; handsome in feature and dress, armed to the teeth with rifle, pistol, and dagger, encircled with three, and sometimes four, belts of rifle-cartridges, and gay in coloured silks. Lazy, good-natured fellows these clansmen seem to be, sauntering to and fro, laughing and chatting with every one, amused at little, and happy and contented at their lot in the high mountains and forests of Kurdistan, believing that there is no country like their own, and no people like themselves ; seldom, if ever, travelling, suspicious of wandering even a score of miles from their villages, and home-sick even then ; thinking every man their enemy out of Kurdistan, and receiving every man as a friend within its boundaries ; hospitable to the few Europeans they ever see, but strong in the belief that they would be murdered if they ever went to Europe. Half villains, half children, confiding and simple in their manners and conversation, brave and vindictive in their warfare ; a race of men who, since the days when Herodotus wrote of them, have changed in nothing but their religion ; and cheery, delightful fellows withal, making night merry with their songs and laughter, and passing the day in idleness or sport. Such are the Kurds of Persian Kurdistan.

I was fortunate enough to be at Serdasht while the wedding-feast of one of the governor's lieutenants

was taking place, and all the shops were closed and the people a-merry-making, music and dancing being the order of the day. The festivities took place upon a green glade only a minute or two's walk from the entrance of the little town, and a gorgeous throng of people it was that I found collected there in the afternoon, for men and women were in holiday attire, rich in silks and brocades. The girls in their long gowns of gold-threaded silk, with bright handkerchiefs on their heads, the long plaits of black hair falling over their shoulders and down their backs, their necks and foreheads hung with coins and ornaments, were scarcely more brilliant than the men, who, with loose baggy white trousers and coats of brilliantly striped silks, with their jackets of white felt and gorgeous silk turbans and peak caps, their skilfully wound sashes of many colours, and their embroidered shoes, were pictures of oriental dandyism. How they all laughed and shouted as they danced to the music of the pipes and drums in the bright afternoon sunlight!

With regard to the feast that was taking place, one amusing incident was brought to my notice. One of my horses had lost a shoe, and I sent Yusef to find the smith. He returned shortly to state that the only shoemaker in the place was in prison, because he had forbidden his wife to go and dance with the rest of

the merry-makers. On his release a few hours later, he came to shoe the horse. He was an elderly, ill-visaged man, and his wife, I heard, young and beautiful; and so great was his jealousy that he had forbidden her to join her fellow-townspeople in their innocent diversions. But the report had reached the governor's ears, and he soon turned the tables upon the ill-conditioned husband by securely putting him under lock and key in the town jail, while his wife danced to her heart's content upon the village green.

I had hoped from Serdasht to have been able to cross the Turkish frontier, which lies within a few miles of this spot, and obtain some insight into the manners and customs of the Kurds under Turkish jurisdiction; but so unpromising were the reports I obtained as to affairs in the strip of country that owns neither Persian nor Turkish influence that I was obliged to decide not to attempt it. With but purely nominal authority on either side of these frontier mountains, it is little to be wondered at that the tribes who inhabit the rocky ranges engage in every kind of pillage and tribal warfare, for should the Turks take it into their head to interfere, they have always Persian territory at hand to seek refuge in, and *vice versa*. Only a few days before, a small caravan had been pillaged of all its merchandise, and the men

stripped of even their scanty clothing, and now all Serdasht was preparing for a foray of revenge. Under these circumstances it would have been madness to proceed; so after a day's rest in the pleasant little town, I turned my horses' heads away from the frontier, descending by a gorge even more lovely than that we had climbed up to Serdasht, and a few hours



*Crossing the Kalu River, Kurdistan.*

later reached the Kalu river, some twenty miles below where we had forded it a few days previously. Here our difficulties began, for the river is larger and swifter at this spot than where we had forded it; and although a small raft, supported on inflated skins, is there to carry one and one's baggage over the rapids, it is by no means a safe or a sure method of making the passage, nor, on account of its frail construction,

can one's horses be tied to it to swim the river. Unsaddling in mid-stream on a stony island to which we had been able with some difficulty to ford, we drove the three horses into the water, while we packed ourselves and our belongings on to the tiny raft, which made its first journey in safety, landing Mohammed and Yusef and some of our scanty baggage on the farther side, and then returned for me and the saddles. Meanwhile the horses, delighted with their baths, took to fighting, and instead of swimming across to the farther bank, recrossed the portion of the river we had already manœuvred, and quietly took to grazing on the bank. This exasperating situation was eventually, however, bettered by our good Haj of Sujbulak, who, although he had been so long absent upon his pilgrimage, had so far refused to leave us. Owing to his exertions, the three steeds were eventually driven across, and after a couple of hours' delay caught and saddled on the farther bank.

A butterfly youth in a pink silk coat and gorgeous turban, with about half a hundredweight of cartridges about his person, had been sent by the Governor of Serdasht to show us the way, and strode on with light and airy step before our little cavalcade. Poor Yusef, my Tabriz Turki servant, who had entered Kurdistan in fear and trembling, had by this period become a sort of jelly with terror; for a more



cowardly set of people than the inhabitants of Tabriz it would be difficult to conceive. Every Kurd he imagined to be a robber, and every rifle was on the point of being aimed at him ! Continually mumbling his prayers, he rode along gazing to right and left, and seeking a place of refuge behind Mohammed or myself at every imaginary danger. To the Persians and Turkis the Kurd is a sort of "bogey-man," used for frightening children and even grown-up people ; but were the two former races to adopt a few of the traits of the latter a better state of things would exist, for in place of the immoral, cowardly, lying, and corrupt state in which Persians and Turkis exist to-day, a little truth-telling and manliness, a little patriotism and morality, would appear, where not a grain of any is to be found to-day.

The river safely crossed, our road ascended on its eastern bank, leading us through a well-populated district, with many picturesque villages perched on the hillsides or in some deep ravine, where generally was to be found a stream of rushing water. As we proceeded, we entered upon a plateau formed by the summits of the hills on the immediate bank of the river, which stretched away to the eastward to where the high-peaked mountains rose up in formidable piles of rock and forest. Nothing more beautiful than this undulating plateau could be imagined. It called to

mind some stately English park, for it stretched away in greensward and forest-trees to where the higher mountains bounded the horizon. Here long glades opened out to right and left; here, again, the forest-trees shaded the road for a quarter of a mile together from the fierce sunlight. Early in the afternoon a deep gorge had to be crossed, and at this spot we encountered the most difficult and fatiguing piece of road we had as yet come across. Riding was out of the question, and we dismounted to lead our horses down the zigzag track that takes one to the bottom of the ravine. The descent was of some 1300 feet, for the most part over slippery soil of loose shales, which gave under the horses' feet. Often we had to hurry our steeds across long slides of this soft material, which seemed to have slipped from higher up the mountain-side. But in spite of the fact that great care was necessitated in successfully accomplishing the descent, one had ample opportunity to admire the grandeur of the scenery. Except where the shale-falls were heaviest, the whole sides of the ravine were thickly overgrown with forest, principally oak-trees, and their stout trunks and grasping roots gave us far more secure foothold than we should otherwise have found. It was wonderful to see our guide, born and bred upon such roads as these, as he skipped from boulder to boulder, singing the while, and twisting his

rifle above his head, or throwing it into the air to catch it again as it fell. Arrived at the bottom, we refreshed our dry throats at the stream that poured down between the almost perpendicular walls of forest and rock, and rested for a while in the shade of the luxuriant vegetation that lined the little river's banks. In many places creepers, roses, and vines stretched from tree to tree over the clear pools and tiny rapids of the rivulet.

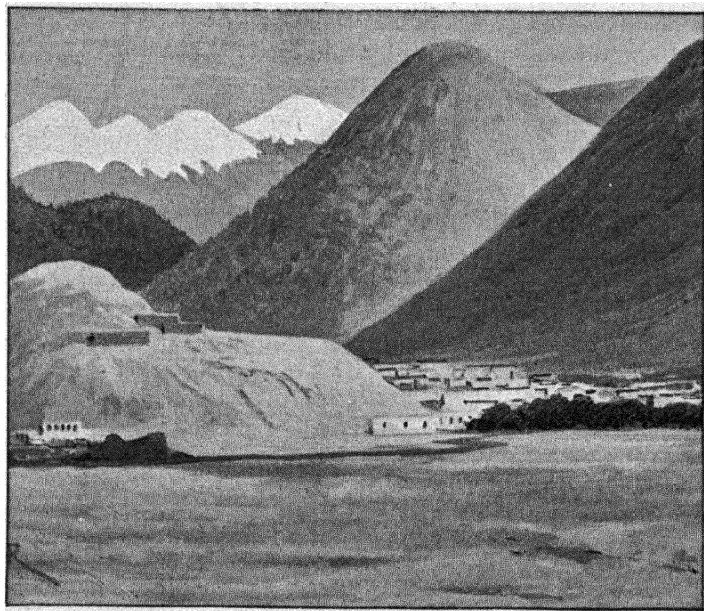
Then the ascent: as steep as where we had descended, a climb of a couple of hours through forest and over rocks and shale—tiring and hot, it is true, but repaying in every step all the fatigue we suffered, for every moment between the trees there opened up some new and lovely prospect of the gorge and the great rock and snow peaks beyond, where it joined the valley of the Kalu. On we toiled, till once more we reached open country at the summit—park-like glades, such as we had been passing through before we reached the deep ravine. Here, too, a scene of great interest and beauty awaited us, for in one of the deepest groves of forest-trees we came across a numerous band of Kurds migrating to their summer quarters. They were resting under the spreading branches of the great trees. The men were seated, smoking and talking or cutting firewood; while the women attended to the cooking of the food, and the

children tended the grazing flocks and herds, cattle and mares. A more purely pastoral scene one could not imagine. The donkeys and cattle, tired with the burden of the black tents they had been carrying, were lying with closed eyes in the shade; the goats and sheep browsed lazily along the banks of a tiny stream, knee-deep in delicious sweet grass and flowers; the blue smoke of the wood fires curled in fanciful wreaths amongst the oak-trees; and everywhere were the gaily-dressed men and women and children, all laughing and singing and resting after their weary trudge.

An hour farther on we reached the large village of Siama, lying in the centre of a large declivity in the hills which was probably once a lake. Here I was housed in the mosque, and treated with all the courtesies and hospitality that the Kurds know so well how to dispense. No European, they told me, had ever been here before, and yet from their kindness and attention one would have imagined that they were accustomed to entertain the "Ferangi." Two large mounds in the vicinity mark, so the natives say, the site of two old cities; and there seems to be some truth in what they state, for I was able to purchase a small number of coins and engraved stones and seals in the village. The people set no value at all upon antiquities, and protracted

travel in these mountain districts of Kurdistan would, I feel sure, well repay the antiquary.

Were I to describe fully each day of our four weeks' journey in Kurdistan, I should use up all the available space at my disposal, and yet fail by a long



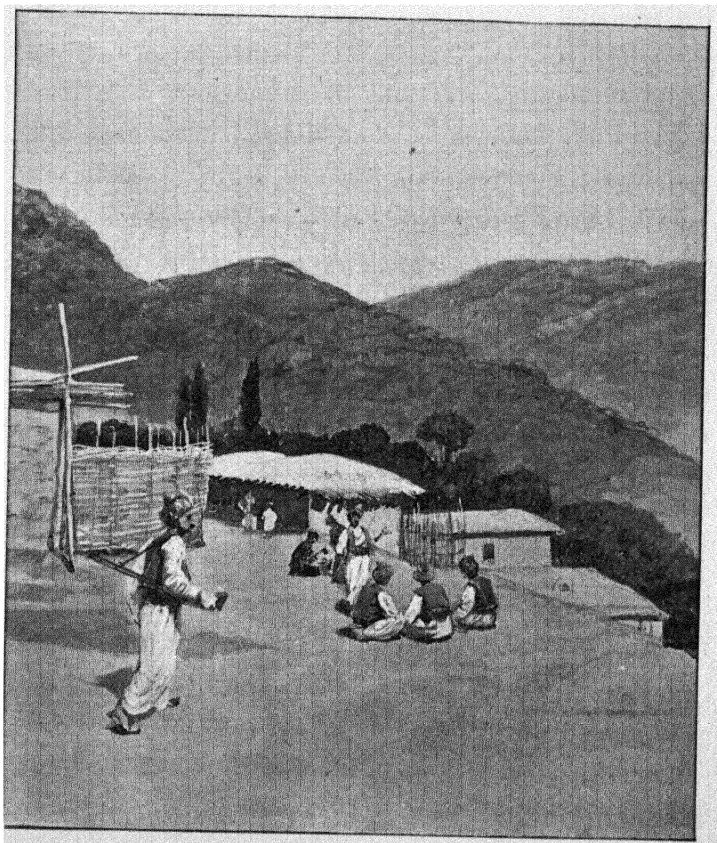
*Approaching Bana.*

spell to bring my narrative to the end of my journey. The day of leaving Siama we reached Bana, a picturesque little town nestling at the foot of high mountains in a circular valley. Here the same hospitality as I have recorded elsewhere was shown me, and under the guidance of the governor, a pleasant

young Kurd, some sports were got up for my amusement, and the afternoon was given up to dancing, partridge-fighting, and shooting at targets, at the latter of which the natives are most proficient. But what to me was the most curious of all the sights of Bana were the gunsmiths, who from raw iron imported from Russia, and without any machinery, can turn out by hand really excellent Martini rifles, firing regulation ammunition; and these they can sell at from £2, 10s. to £4 sterling! I sat for a long time watching these men at work, and one could not help admiring their dexterity and the skill with which they manufactured and fitted all the parts of the rifle, which when completed bore not only every resemblance to the real article, but even the stamps of the Prussian and Turkish firms that manufacture them. This art is entirely self-taught, and originated absolutely from copying the genuine article. That the rifled barrels are capable of good direction I can answer myself, as I was witness to some really excellent shooting at 200 to 400 yards with these same hand-made weapons.

Here, again, at Bana all idea of pushing into Turkish Kurdistan was quickly at an end, for at the time of my stay in the little town a large body of influential Kurds were there from over the frontier to try and arrange a settlement of the interminable

feuds that existed amongst the tribes, and they pointed out to me once for all how dangerous any attempt to push through during the absence of the chief men would be. There remained only to once more abandon my idea, and proceed on my travels farther into Persian territory.



*Zarnau-i-Sifla, Kurdistan.*

## CHAPTER XI.

## BANA TO KERMANSHAH.

I HAVE divided my travels in Persian Kurdistan into two portions, not only because as one chapter its length would have been excessive, but also because after leaving Bana, although our travels were still for some time to be amongst Kurds, we left the independent tribes behind, and entered upon an entirely different class of people. The Kurd seems greatly susceptible to extraneous influences, and in the case of Persia the influences of the reigning Power are by no means elevating ones. The short journey of a couple of days between Bana and Sakiz showed us the transition between the Kurd of the highlands, an independent, hospitable, and kindly warrior, and his brother of the country more accessible to Persian officials. Here we found a class of people debased in life, ideas, and morality, aping the Persian in dress and character, and suffering hardships at the hands of Persian officialdom.







Half an hour across the plain from Bana brought our little cavalcade, augmented by a gay Kurd on foot as guide and guard, into a wide valley, at a village of which—Sabatu—our *zaptieh* was changed, the first returning to Bana and the second continuing the journey with us. Ascending the valley, we soon commenced a steep climb, and by three in the afternoon had reached the summit of the pass, at an altitude of only a few feet short of 7000 above the sea-level. Here we were to leave behind the lovely forest country through which so much of our traveling of late had been, and to enter upon bare hillsides and cultivated fields. Snow lay thickly at this high altitude, although the afternoon was almost oppressively hot; but it was the last snow we were to cross upon our journey, though often on the road to Kermanshah we were to catch glimpses of the white frontier peaks away to the west. A descent almost as steep as the climb up brought us, first by narrow gorges, then through wild picturesque little cañons, to the more open land of the valley, where fields of rising grain lined the banks of the stream. Passing several mud villages, near one of which a group of dancing Kurds proved so tempting to our guide that in spite of his long walk he went and merrily joined the throng, until we heartlessly called him away, we found quarters for the night at

Miradeh, the residence of an Aghá, a Kurdish chief. Here Persian civilisation was visible for the first time for a long while in a well-built red-brick house, faced with large windows, and rather resembling a railway station on some retired line in England. However, we were not dissatisfied in spite of its unpicturesque appearance, for a room was soon prepared for us, and supper brought. Quite a number of the Kurdish villagers—especially the attendants of the young Aghá, together with more than one member of his family—shared our meal and our room with us. A pleasant jovial crowd they were—nearly all speaking Persian or Turki, and showing in their costume their proximity to people other than the Kurds.

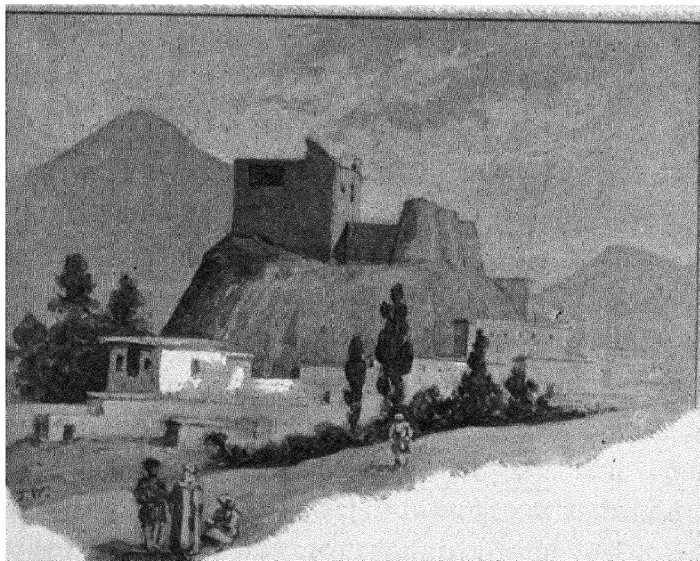
Two hours in the early morning along the river-bank brought us to the village of yet another Aghá, where Persian proclivities were even more apparent than at Miradeh; for here the female folk, while not keeping within doors or veiling their faces, had adopted Persian costume. Anything more hideous than the result can scarcely be imagined. The dress of the women of Northern Persia is such that one is really grateful to the men for keeping their wives and daughters in seclusion. Over cotton "tights" hangs a small skirt of many pleats, exactly resembling the dress of a second-rate ballet-girl in a second-

rate theatre. The fact that this skirt, which stands out stiffly all round, and does not reach as low as the knees, is usually soiled and tinsel-bedecked, does not add anything to its attractiveness. A bodice, cut square and generally dirty, decorated with inferior gold braid, exposing the neck and arms, and often a portion of the body between its lower ends and the top of the skirt, completes the disfiguring garb of a female of Northern Persia. Incongruous, indeed, it seemed in this Kurdish village, which appeared altogether like a scene in a low and second-rate opera-bouffe, with its mud houses and skipping *corps de ballet*, who one and all turned out to see the European. On their heads they wore large black turbans, into which plaits of their hair, after hanging over their shoulders in large loops, were fastened. One who had some pretensions to good looks, and who, I was told, was a newly wedded wife of the fat old Aghá, wore a quantity of gold coins—English sovereigns, napoleons, and Turkish pounds—in her turban and round her neck. She must have carried at least a hundred pounds worth of gold coin about with her; and judging from the state of her costume, which was ultra-short, she apparently slept with the whole concern of tights, skirt, bodice, turban, and coins on her.

The Aghá's residence was a respectable building

of mud, just outside which stood the mosque, with a gallery and small verandah, from which the *mued-din* called the hour to prayer. For the rest the village displayed little else but inferior mud hovels.

After breakfast for ourselves and our horses we started once more on our way.



*Sahab, near Sakiz.*

The approach to Sakiz is a most picturesque one, for the town lies at the end of the valley, a mile or two beyond where the river leaves the hills to flow into the open plain. The town does not stand on the immediate banks of the stream, but half a mile or so away, on a low ridge of hills, which slope down

to the water's edge in a series of gardens. But the charm of the scene is lost as soon as one enters the place, which is poor enough, with shabby bazaars and narrow streets. At a large caravanserai, more or less in ruins, we took up our abode, and were fortunate in being able to obtain a decent room and tolerable privacy, though the efforts of a handful of Armenians to enforce their company upon us required all our united stratagems to defeat. They were good fellows in their way, and thought perhaps they were doing us a service in coming to inquire after my wants; but soon their politeness could not conceal their desire to make money, and as soon as curios were mentioned they came and went perpetually, bringing all the rubbish of the town for my inspection. One man, however, Haj Fatha Saïd by name, has a by no means poor collection of Babylonian and Assyrian seals and cylinders, and it is to him that the peasants bring their "finds" for sale. The prices he asked, however, and the value placed upon the objects, put all ideas of purchase out of the question; and his manner, as soon as he found I would not give anything approaching what he asked, entirely changed, and he became offensive and rude.

Our caravanserai was full of Kurdish tribesmen, smoking their thick-stemmed short pipes and tend-

ing their animals. A genial lot of men they were, and, unasked, lent a hand in the tethering and feeding of my horses.

Two days' ride over an elevated plateau, with constant views of ranges of mountains on our right, and one or two rivers to cross, brought us to Sinna, the capital of Persian Kurdistan. Our last stopping-place was Huseynabad, a poor enough spot, but with picturesque surroundings of rugged mountains. After a long ascent I found the altitude above the sea-level to be 6800 feet, and from this spot we descended to the banks of a river, where rice was growing in marshy fields. Another hour's ride brought us to the summit of one of the spurs of the range on our right, and thence we obtained a fine view of that most charming town Sinna, lying nestling in the hills, and surrounded on almost all sides by gardens. A quarter of an hour's trot and we had crossed the large graveyard and were entering the town.

The heat was intense, and to add to our discomfort we found it impossible to obtain quarters at either of the two best caravanserais, and were at last driven to be satisfied with a small and none too clean a room in a half-ruined khan. But the aid of a plentiful supply of water and a broom, followed by an excellent breakfast from a neighbouring cook-shop for ourselves, and



a good feed of new hay for our horses, restored once more our peace of mind. Nor were we destined to remain long in our shabby abode, for amongst a crowd of people who came out of curiosity to see us was a Nestorian of the Chaldæan sect, who invited us to take up our residence in his house. This we were glad enough to do, and an hour later we found ourselves comfortably installed in his abode, reclining on carpets and cushions, with every want attended to.

A few words must be said about my host. He was a man of middle age, handsome features, and pleasant manner. A most devout Catholic—for he belonged to the division of the Nestorian Church which has gone over to Rome—he never missed an opportunity of crossing himself and saying long graces over his food. He boasted that he had never once neglected attending his church on the Sabbath or a saint's day for fourteen years. Yet he was, I think, about the most immoral man I ever met. It took about ten minutes to take stock of his house, and when taken, it presented such a surprise that, were one not used to seeing strange things in Eastern lands, one would have been too shocked to remain. But my experiences of such characters did not deter me from remaining as his guest, as a luxurious lodging in the house of an immoral man is better than

a dirty room in a ruined caravanserai. Besides, his private doings had nothing to do with me. Yet he was, to all outward appearances, a charming companion, and attended to my every want with the utmost zeal, and the four days I spent at Sinna were the most comfortable I had known since leaving Tabriz. My host was evidently a man of means, for the comparatively rich furnishing of his apartment bespoke luxury and ease. The house was built round three sides of a square, the fourth side consisting of the division-wall of his and his neighbour's gardens. A huge mulberry-tree stood in the centre of the yard, and threw delicious shade over a large portion of the open court. The room we occupied was on the first floor of the house—for the building was of two storeys—and consisted, like almost all rooms in this part of Persia, of a long narrow chamber with recesses in the walls for cupboards, and a huge window at one end and fireplace at the other. The framework of the window, filled with glass instead of the usual paper, slid to one side, and a pile of soft mattresses and pillows formed a most luxurious seat, whence I could see my horses tethered in the court beneath, and across the wall of the garden obtain a view of a portion of the town and the hills beyond.

Of the attractions of Sinna I cannot speak too

highly. Whether I am biassed in its favour by the comfort I experienced there after so much hard travelling I do not know, but certainly the impression left upon me by four days' stay in the town is a most pleasant one.

As to its situation, Sinna lies nestled in hills, above a stream of clean running water that tumbles in a deep gully below the very houses. This little valley, with its thickly wooded slopes, is a charming spot, and one much frequented by the townspeople; for not only do the dandies of the place come here to drink tea in one of the many *cafés*, but the youth and beauty of the other sex seek it as a suitable spot to do their washing in, and bandy words with their "young men"—or some one else's, as the case may be. Whatever fault may be found with this system, it certainly adds not a little to the attractiveness of the picture, the charm of which is not a little owing to the gay groups of youths and maidens one is constantly coming across.

In the centre of the town stands, high above the houses, the palace of the governors of the place, a hereditary post held by one of the old Kurdish princely families. This group of buildings, with its ancient towers and more modern palace, forms a feature in the scene, from whichever way one looks at it. At the foot of this hill, crowned by its fortress,

are the bazaars, stretching in every direction, new and neatly laid out, every street almost at right angles or parallel to the next. Here and there an opening in these domed arcades gives one a glimpse of some great caravanserai with its handsome windows and domes, its immense paved courtyard, and its fountain. Several of these caravanserais are really fine buildings of most pleasing appearance and highly decorative architecture. In them the principal portion of the trade of the place is carried on.

But it is no doubt to the natives of Sinna that much of its attractiveness is owing; for whether it be in the great bazaars, or in the *cafés*, or away in the gardens of the suburbs, one is always treated with a civility and deference that contrasts with the manners of the Turkis and Persians, much to the disparagement of the latter. But then the inhabitants of Sinna are Kurds, and that in itself is enough to explain to a great degree their behaviour. Any traveller knows what a difference the treatment he receives makes to his impressions of a place. Where one is received politely and with no show of fanaticism, everything seems to go smoothly and well, and an immense addition is made to the pleasure of one's stay. And so it was in Sinna. In the long bazaars, my constant resort on prowls for curiosities, nothing could have exceeded the kindness of every one with whom I came

in contact. The dealer of second-hand rubbish would turn over his stores on the chance of finding some object that might please me, and the weaver would cease his weaving to show me how his loom worked. From the *cafés* more than one voice would hail me to come and drink a cup of tea within, and the owner of the clean tiled eating-shop, with its array of tempting cooked dishes, invited me to partake of his wares. Everywhere a smile and a greeting, everywhere a polite word.

And if the town of Sinna proved attractive, the suburbs did so almost more ; for amongst the gardens, with their hedges of roses, one can wander at one's ease in the shade, listening to the songs of the pleasure-loving Kurds and the babbling of the stream hidden in dense trees below. The bloom was still on the *sunjit*—jujube—trees, and the air full of its fragrance ; while the roses, white and pink and lemon-yellow, trailed in untrained luxuriance over every hedge and up the very trunks of the trees, to hang in festoons from their branches. It is beyond these gardens that the official whose duty it is to look after foreigners resides, in a charming house on the summit of a wooded hill. The fact that there are *no* foreigners in Sinna does not make his Excellency's post a very laborious one, and so he had ample opportunity to look after me. He *viséd* my passport some

half-dozen times—at a small fee—and gave me letters of introduction to half the officials in Persia—fee still smaller; but there wasn't any room on my passport for further *visés*. Then he sent me a lot of sweets, came a dozen times to call, and finally, in spite of his gorgeous uniform of white cloth and gold lace, accepted half a sovereign as a "tip." He was worth much more than that, for he was a delightful little creature, all smiles and courtesy, and I felt a real affection for him, so naïve and ingenuous he was.

There was one particular spot on the hill opposite the town that I, in company with my Nestorian host, used to frequent. It was a *café*, a mere hut, with a terrace in front of it, from which a splendid view of the town was to be obtained. Many of the better-class townspeople seemed to appreciate the charming situation, for there was always a brightly coloured merry little band of them, drinking tea and talking and singing. Under the shade of the big trees that overhung the little terrace they formed a charming picture, in their gay clothes of silk and fine linen.

With the exception of the palace on its hill there is but one building of any great beauty or importance in Sinna—an old mosque, almost on the outskirts of the town, on its north-west side. This edifice is still in excellent repair, and presents a façade of such tile-

work and faïence as I saw nowhere else in Persia. No words could describe the exquisite blending of colours and design, the shades of blues and dull pinks, the contrasts of black and white and soft yellows, that cover the entire front of the façade. Great panels of mythical flowers of every hue, long friezes of inscriptions in white on a dark-blue ground, follow one upon the other, the whole blending in the most perfect manner. The remainder of the mosque presents no features of any great interest, for besides the façade the minarets alone are faced with tiles, in this case principally shades of blue.

After four days' rest we set out once more upon our travels under the guidance of an aged soldier, mounted upon an aged horse, supplied by his Excellency of Foreign Affairs (included in the ten-shilling tip). This soldier made so much of the fact that he knew every inch of the road that I was not in the least surprised to find that by ten o'clock—for we were travelling by night—he had not the least idea as to our whereabouts, except that we were on the edge of a precipice with apparently no road either up or down. However, an hour or so of scrambling and danger brought us to a river-bed, which the old idiot confessed he had never seen before, and which might have been a thousand miles away from our road for all he knew. There was nothing for it, so we un-

saddled and tethered our horses, and sat down for the rest of the night by the banks of the stream. I talked to that soldier for about three hours in a language of which he knew not one word ; but all the same, he wept profusely at the thought of getting no bakshish at the other end, and a possibility of imprisonment—at least I imagine that to have been the train of his thoughts, for whenever he spoke he did so in Kermanji, a language of which I knew some dozen words—and he never seemed to use any of these.

Morning came at last, and we found our road, far from which we had wandered, and proceeded to mid-day quarters at a dreary village, where we rested until evening.

As sunset was approaching we started once again, crossing parallel ranges of hills and more than one small river. Just at dark we emerged upon a plain, across which a distant view of mountains could be obtained. Needless to say, our soldier-guide lost the way amongst the bewildering sheep-tracks that cross this level piece of ground, and we groped about uselessly in the dark. At length, exasperated by the manner in which we were travelling round in a series of circles, I spied, to my delight, some fires a long way ahead, and proposed that we should ride to them and inquire. The soldier and Yusef both attempted



to dissuade me, stating that the place was infested with Kurdish robbers; but as I knew Yusef had never been here before, and I had grave doubts as to whether the soldier ever had, Mohammed and I started off without more ado, followed by the loudly expostulating couple.

It was farther than I thought; but the sight which met our eyes when we did arrive repaid the long trot over the plain, for we cantered straight into the middle of a large Kurdish encampment, before which the embers of a few fires still sparkled. The place was wrapped in darkness, only in the starlight we could make out the outline of the huge tents. My cry of "Warra! warra!"—the call used by the Kurds to attract attention—was quickly answered, and before a minute had elapsed we were completely surrounded by a band of armed men, one or two of whom seized my bridle. Mohammed was with me, but Yusef and the soldier kept at a safe distance, lost to sight in the darkness. As soon as it was discovered that we were strangers and meant no harm, lights were struck, little oil-wicks lit in the tents, and we were invited within, where milk and cream were brought. Meanwhile our two cowards, seeing that no harm had come to us, arrived, and through them we were able to make ourselves understood, and to learn that we had missed the main track two or three

miles to the left. After half an hour's rest and a smoke with our kind hosts in the great tent of the Aghá of the tribe, we set out once more.

But this half-hour was one I shall never forget. The camp-fires had been raked up, fresh grass and thorn-bush thrown on, and in the glare of the flames we sat under the tent, an Englishman, an Arab, a Turki, and a score of Kurds. The dancing flames flashed on the barrels of their rifles, illuming their wild features, half-covered by loosely folded turbans. Without was inky darkness except for a myriad stars, which appeared to increase in brightness and dwindle again as the flames of the camp-fires rose and fell. It was the last peep of wild Kurdish life we were to see ; for on the morrow we reached Kermanshah, and thence to Baghdad we proceeded by a regular caravan-road, which boasts tolerable civilisation.

Half-a-dozen young Kurds were sent with us to put us on the right road, and at the entrance to the valley, having shaken hands all round and wished each other every good luck, they turned back. Then hour after hour along the flat wide valley,—in darkness all the while,—with its high cliffs of precipitous rock on either hand, throwing fantastic shadows across our path, when they came between us and the now risen moon. At dawn we reached the end of the gorge, near half-a-dozen mud villages, and cross-

ing the plain, emerged into the wide valley of the Kara Su. We stopped but once, to drink and to bathe our tired faces at a deep pool beneath a precipice of rock, into which the water tumbled from a subterranean channel. Then on again, fording the Kara Su, with the town of Kermanshah looming up before us on the opposite hills, a low line of building on a spur of the range. And at last, after some twelve hours continuously on horseback, we reached the suburbs and gardens of the town, and passing through some streets of houses of poor appearance, we entered Kermanshah, or Kermanshahan as the town ought more properly to be called, to distinguish it from the province, one of the richest in Persia. The town possesses a population of something over 30,000 inhabitants, though only some ten years ago it was said to contain a very much larger number. But bad government has driven many of its population to seek existence elsewhere. It lies on the southern side of the wide valley of the Kara Su (Kurdish for Black River), and slightly raised on hills above the surrounding plain. The town is walled, but the fortifications are in a state of miserable repair, as in fact is the whole place, the entire town presenting the appearance of fast falling into decay. The climate, though not severe, is said to be very feverish at times, and generally unhealthy.

Kermanshahan was founded by Varahran IV., who had been Viceroy of Kerman previously, and was on this account known as Kerman Shah. But what little the place possesses of interest, besides the antiquities in the neighbourhood, of which more anon, is due to the extravagance of Mohammed Ali Mirza and his son Imam Kuleh Mirza, to whom are owing the principal bazaars, mosques, and the picturesque betowered palace in the town, and the several large and now half-ruined residences strewn over the valley amongst large gardens, for which the neighbourhood is so famous. But even these badly built buildings, which in their time must have presented handsome examples of contemporary architecture, are to-day little more than ruins, though not a century has elapsed since they were raised. One garden alone in the town, with the remains of a series of fountains and a handsome summer-house containing two floors of large rooms, is still in tolerable repair, and the garden shows some signs of attention; but this is more probably owing to the fact that the spot is the resort of the wealthier class of the Kermanshahan merchants, and not to the generosity of the native Government. There are practically no European residents in the place, though at the time of my visit a missionary and his wife were there attending to the medical mission and the schools, and these

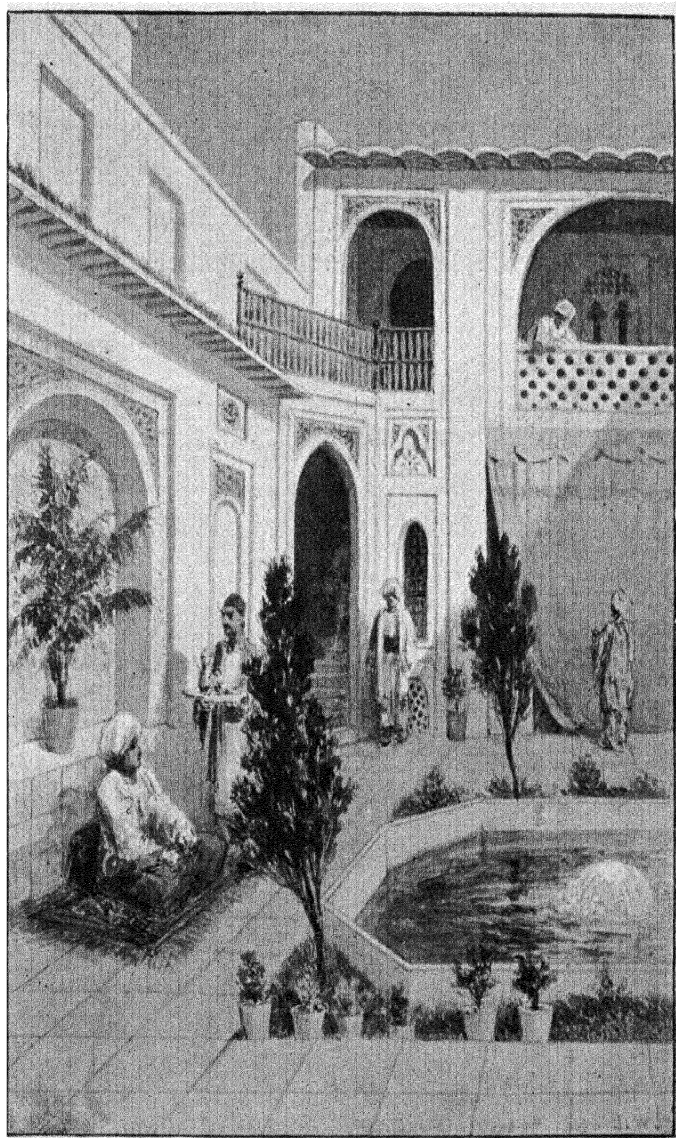
were the first Europeans I had come across since leaving Tabriz.

The fact that Kermanshah lies on the highroad from Baghdad into Persia, and is the first place of importance over the frontier, formerly, when the large portion of the trade of the country came by that route, gave the town a position of activity and wealth that is only noticeable to-day by its entire absence. In place of the long strings of mules and horses bearing merchandise, almost the only caravans of importance that pass through are those of pilgrims on their way to Kerbela and the holy shrines, and the gruesome strings of animals bearing the dead bodies of the faithful on their last journey for sepulture at the same revered spots. The reason of the decrease of the trade is not far to seek. Persia is to-day supplied almost entirely *via* Trebizond, or *via* Ispahan and the Persian Gulf, and in all probability the further utilising of the Karun river will open anew the extremely ancient route through the Bakhtiari country. In any case there seems but little hope of any great amount of its former trade returning to Kermanshah, and the city already wears the appearance of its fast decay and quickly decreasing population.

Yet in spite of the fact that there is but little of interest in the place itself, my stay there of three or

four days was pleasant enough. On my arrival in the town I had proceeded straight to the house of a certain Haj abd er-Rahim, a son of the Vekil ed-Dowleh, who was during his life a well-known character in Persia. Haj Agha Mohammed Hassan was his name, and he originally came into Persia with Sir Henry Rawlinson, where his knowledge of things oriental and his usefulness to our authorities there caused his being made a British subject. Taking up his residence at Kermanshah—he was a native of Baghdad—he entered upon trade on a large scale and amassed a considerable fortune. He died at an advanced age a few years ago, his son, Haj Abd er-Rahim succeeding to the larger part of his lands and possessions. I found this gentleman absent from Kermanshah on a visit to Tehran; but the representatives that he had left in charge of his house insisted on my staying there, and it was not long before I found myself comfortably installed in a better-class Persian residence.

The place resembled nearly all large houses in the East. One enters by a dilapidated doorway into a dark passage, from which a second door opens into a small courtyard, with rooms opposite to one another on two of the sides. A general appearance of decay lay over everything; the paved floor was sadly in need of its stones being relaid, the coloured tiles inlaid in



COURT IN THE HOUSE OF THE VEKIL ED-DOWLEH AT KERMANSHAH.





the brick walls were tumbling out, and neither doors nor windows fitted properly. But this, after all, is only the state of things found everywhere throughout Persia. A staircase led from this court to a gallery above, and still higher up was a sort of glass-room on the roof, from which an extensive view of the plain and the mountains opposite could be obtained. Beyond the square courtyard that I have mentioned above is another, containing a few plants and a fountain, and built in much more decorative style than the former. On one side of this open space is a large room reserved for guests, while opposite are the rooms of the host himself. The whole presents by no means a poor appearance, though here again the bad material of which everything is built cannot but be noticeable. Some of the highly coloured tilework let into the arches of the doors and windows is bright and effective. It was in this little courtyard that I took up my residence, and had it not been that I was never free for one moment from the attentions of my host's servants, who in his absence had no intention of allowing a European to pass through without extortion, my stay would have been as pleasant as possible. But Haj Abd er-Rahim's retinue continued all day long to pour into my ear such pitiful untruths as to their master's meanness and their own wants, and such pointed demands for bakshish, that I was

obliged at length to pretend to be about to leave the house in order to escape their petitions; and when at the end of my short visit I distributed amongst them a much handsomer present than I had any need, or any right, to do, they commenced to grumble at the amount. Had the host himself been present I have no doubt none of this would have happened; but I state it here in warning to any unsuspecting traveller who, like myself a bearer of a letter of introduction to the family of the Vekil ed-Dowleh, may suffer as I did, and scarcely find a moment's peace from the narration of scurrilous scandal and the demanding of bakshish. There was but one exception in the household, the old cook, who had been at the British Legation at Tehran, and who all through never once gave me cause of complaint.

Sight-seeing in Kermanshah is very simple, for there is little or nothing to see. The long tunnelled bazaars are picturesque enough, and yielded after a diligent search a few curiosities of arms and armour, but with this exception there is very little worth purchasing.

My pleasantest recollection of the place, with the exception, perhaps, of my visit to the rock sculptures at Tak-i-Bostan, was an afternoon spent with the young Turkish Consul-General, who, educated in Constantinople, was as pleased to meet a civilised

being as I was to meet him. I called on him, in the first place, to get my papers put in order for proceeding to Baghdad, a very simple process, and stayed smoking his excellent cigarettes and drinking coffee the whole afternoon, in a charming great cool room in his house, furnished half in European and half in oriental style. The Consul spoke French like a native, and some little Arabic, but had not as yet mastered Persian. He bemoaned his lot at being sent to such an outlandish and far-away spot as this, but congratulated himself that money was to be made, on account of the enormous number of Persians passing through Kermanshah on their way to the holy shrines, one and all of whom require passports. Altogether my recollection of my visit to this polished and charming gentleman has left a most pleasant impression on my mind.

On one afternoon of my stay an excursion was made to Tak-i-Bostan to see the famous sculptures on the rocks. A large carriage, with a pair of horses and a postilion, awaited us near the entrance to the town, for the streets are too narrow to allow of driving with any ease or safety within, and with a body of mounted men we set out for our picnic.

My hosts consisted of two Persian merchants of Ispahan, who had undertaken to entertain me, together with a dozen or more of the retinue of the

Haj Abd er-Rahim. My two Ispahan hosts, polite to an extreme, and with all the delightful manner of the best class of oriental, were, however, very shy, and it was with no little difficulty at first that I could draw them into conversation. Probably the fact of their being Sheiyas prevented their feeling anything like pleasure at driving in a carriage with a European; but their dignified manner concealed any such idea, and nothing could have been kinder or more considerate than was their manner. We crossed the Kura Su by a rickety bridge, and after being shown over a modern country house, possessing no claim to any beauty, belonging to the Haj Abd er-Rahim, we proceeded the remaining part of the distance to our destination.

The sculptures at Tak-i-Bostan—the “garden arch”—are numbered amongst the most celebrated rock carvings of Persia. This collection of sculptures forms two arches in the rock, the back and sides of which, as well as the rock encircling the entrance, are covered with carvings of the greatest interest if of no particular artistic beauty.

The largest and most important of these grottoes measures some 32 feet in height by 24 wide, and over 20 in depth. On the face of the cliff without, on either side of the entrance, are two angel figures in relief, each bearing a wreath, while in the centre is a

crescent. Below the angels are entablatures of handsome scroll design. Within, the right-hand wall represents a hunting-party under Chosroes II., who is himself presented in the picture mounted on a horse under an umbrella, and again, lower down, a similar figure seems to represent him at a gallop. This wall was never completed, only portions being finely cut, the rest left rough, just as it must have been ready for the finishing touches and the polishing. The relief is low, but protection from the damp and rain has preserved the sculptures in excellent condition. On the opposite (left) wall the royal huntsmen are engaged in driving wild boar, many of the men being in boats amongst high rushes. As in the other, elephants are represented. Here again Chosroes II. is twice present, both times in a boat, in one case drawing his bow and in the other receiving a dart or arrow.

At the back of the grotto are the larger and more pretentious sculptures. This portion of the arch is divided into two parts, the upper possessing three figures, and the lower a gigantic representation of the king on horseback. The three figures at the top are Chosroes II. again, gorgeously apparelled, with a figure on either hand doing him homage. The equestrian figure below is certainly the finest piece of work, and though much damaged and defaced, shows signs

of artistic skill and excellent workmanship. Both the king and his steed are enveloped in coats of mail, while in his majesty's hand is a gigantic lance, which he holds poised over his horse's head. Above the sculpture, on the left side of the arch, is a group representing Mohammed Ali Shah, gorgeously painted and gilded. He was the possessor of these gardens with their arches and palace early in this century. The second arch is smaller, and has suffered much from the pious destruction and mutilations of the Moslems. Near by, upon the face of the same cliff, is a panel of the Sassanian dynasty, supposed to represent Shapur I. being invested as viceroy by his father.

The sculptures altogether are of a kind that appeal more to the antiquarian than to the artist, though as a matter of fact they only date back to the reign of Chosroes Parviz (591-628 A.D.), and are modern compared to the antiquities of Egypt and Babylonia, &c. But whoever might fail to find an interest in the actual carvings could not but be impressed by the surroundings, for from under the rock bursts forth a clear cold stream of water, immediately above which stands the country palace of Mohammed Ali Shah, now in the possession of Hadj Abd er-Rahim, the son of the old Vekil ed-Dowleh. From the small tank into which the water first bursts it finds an exit into a large and deep reservoir, surrounded with an avenue of trees.

A charming place to spend a few quiet hours it is ; and in what would answer to the basement of the palace there is an open room, the building above being supported on pillars, in which the spring finds its exit from its pent-up sources in the cliff behind.

The carriage was able to bring us close up to the house, within a hundred yards or so of the caves, and in the room in which the spring emerges we found tea and a repast of green lettuces, sherbets, and sweets awaiting us. Here, after we had seen the sights of the place, we sat and rested—chairs, rugs, and pillows having been brought for the occasion. A young Kurd, one of our party, and myself amused ourselves and our hosts by swimming and diving in the great reservoir opposite the house, and delicious and cool the water was. The surprise of our hosts was ridiculous. “It will kill you,” they said pleadingly ; “the water is cold, very cold. No one ever swims here : it is deep ; much deeper than you are high ; you will drown.” However, as soon as they saw that I apparently had no intention of drowning, and that the young Kurd was going to keep me company in the water, and save me if need be, they ceased these objections.

It was night before we got back to Kermanshah, and the latter part of our drive was delicious ; for the afterglow mixed strangely with the moonlight, and

wrapped the plain and its gardens and the town and hills beyond in a filmy mist of rosy silver.

But the days were slipping away, and both we and our horses were refreshed enough by our rest to make a start upon the last stage of the journey by land, and accordingly on the 7th June we left Kermanshah in the afternoon on our way to Baghdad.



## CHAPTER XII.

## KERMANSHAH TO BAGHDAD.

OF my journey from Kermanshah to Baghdad, I have, I fear, not much of interest to say. Summer was by this time well on, and summer in the plains, and even in the mountains, in this portion of the globe, means intense heat; and intense heat means travelling at night. And so it was that on the 220 miles that separate these two towns I saw but little of the road, except such romantic glimpses as could be obtained under the influence of a bright moon. Nor is there much to see, for as soon as the Persian mountains are left behind and one descends to the vast plain that surrounds the bed of the Tigris, all scenery is left behind, and in its place one passes for days and nights over a dreary waste of desert. But all travelling in the daytime was out of the question, and even the nights as we neared Baghdad were stifling and hot.

It was a broiling afternoon as we rode away from the doors of the house of the Vekil ed-Dowleh, and the wind was blowing great gusts of dust that nearly blinded both man and horse. The usual delays had made us much later in starting than I had intended, and at the last moment, when everything was ready, I found my horse had been pricked by a nail in being shod and was dead lame. Through the dust-storm I led him back to the farrier's and had the shoe replaced. These annoyances, added to the now perfectly exasperating demands of the servants of the house for bakshish, altogether upset the equilibrium of my temper, and I fumed inwardly. At length, a couple of hours after I had intended, we made a start, and proceeding through the long tunnel-like bazaars, emerged from the town. Here fate had still another annoyance in store for me, and at the local custom-house the guards wanted to search us and make us pay duty on our scanty baggage. I had hired a mule to carry our saddle-bags as far as Baghdad, using the owner, a wily old Arab, who accompanied us, as a guide, — and these two, mule and man, the guards absolutely refused to let pass without my bestowing a perfectly illegal and illogical bakshish. This I stoutly refused to do; and knowing that in the East a show of temper is of no avail, I swallowed my wrath

and argued, coolly and collectedly, with the soldiers, with the result that they confessed they had no right to touch either me or any animal of mine, but that the mule and rider were both Arabs, and therefore I could not interfere. This was all I wanted, and I solved the matter in a minute. I put the Arab, on my horse and I rode his mule! There was no question about it then; the guards, on their own confession, could stop neither me nor my horse, and we rode quietly on, amidst the laughter of the men at being outwitted, to change our mounts again 50 yards past the custom-house: and in spite of wind, heat, dust, and the impertinent soldiery, I never once swore! This fact so convinced me of my inestimable self-control, and so satisfied was I with my conduct that I quickly forgot all the delays and discomforts, and jogged along the road as though no annoyances had been heaped one upon the other ever since we had commenced to superintend our departure six hours or so before; but when Yusef quietly informed me half an hour later that he had forgotten to bring any provisions for the road—a fact I thought I had sufficiently drummed into his head—my inestimable self-control burst all its bounds, and all for no purpose too, as Mohammed had our bag of bread tied on to the back of the saddle, and it was *Yusef himself* who had put it

there. I really wished it had been forgotten, to give me some excuse for the choice expressions I made use of; but they were wasted, one and all, for the bread was there right enough.

But the afternoon cooled down, and with the change of temperature came some relief. The wind dropped; no longer the dust blew in clouds into our eyes and mouths, and as sunset approached travelling became pleasant enough.

It had been dark about an hour when we reached the large caravanserai of Mahidasht, lying in the centre of a level valley. The moon was, however, sufficiently bright to make travelling tolerably easy, and to allow us to gather some sort of an idea of the lie of the land. The scene at the gate of the great enclosed khan, which, surrounded by the village of the same name, gives protection to passing caravans, was a picturesque one. A great dark archway, pointed at the top, gives entrance to the enclosed square, in which were a number of horses and mules, one and all busily feeding, while their masters smoked or sipped their sweet tea out of little tumblers. In front of the gateway was an open space on which were quite a number of *cafés*, some extemporised out of the boughs of trees and thatch, while others again were more solidly built of mud. From within the latter

sounds of music proceeded, mingled with talking and laughter.

We rested at Mahidasht for an hour and a half, seeking one of the secluded archways which surrounded the great court of the khan, where, the night being still, we managed to light a candle to eat our suppers in comfort, while our horses chewed the barley in their nose-bags. Then Yusef brought us a few cups of sweet tea, after which, and a cigarette apiece, we mounted and were off again. Our road led us from the village to a bridge over the river, and this crossed, we continued our way over the level valley beyond. At length, however, the Chardzubar hills were reached, and we ascended in the pale moonlight by an execrable road, for the most part over a smooth surface of rock. Riding was out of the question, and even while we led our horses their falls were by no means few and far between, for they could obtain no foothold on the slippery stone. The night was warm and the moonlight bright, and travelling pleasant enough; but by 5 A.M., when, after crossing an apparently endless succession of hills and valleys, we arrived at Harunabad, or Haruniyeh, as it is sometimes called, we were, men and horses, dead tired. We had been on the march since half-past four the evening before, and had rested only an hour and

a half at Mahidasht, and again to drink a hurried cup of tea and smoke a cigarette at a wayside *café* situated on the Haj Aghá Chai, half-way between the caravanserai and our halting-place. However, just as the sun had risen and cheered our tired and weary spirits, we descended to the wide open valley of Zobeida, and turning to the right along the edge of the hills across which we had arrived, we soon espied at no great distance in front of us the collection of buildings that mark the site of the former town of Harunabad.

But little remains to-day of the city founded here by Harun er-Rashid, from whom it took its name. The great caravanserai of the place, which must at one time have been a fine building, is now nearly a ruin and deserted. It is true a few modern houses are to be seen, one of which, the highest and most pretentious, forms a sort of general warehouse, in which a few traders have their shops. Just opposite this building are the roofed bazaars, one miserable narrow and short street, begrimed and dirty, with the usual type of little shops on each side. Through the village, surrounded on both sides by filthy black mud, flows a stream of water, which, above, quite pure and sparkling, becomes on entering the village foul and evil-smelling. On the bank, at a little distance from the stream, are a number of mud-built houses, the

fronts of which are turned in summer into verandahs in order to entice the passer-by to rest. The shade certainly looks enticing, and the small raised platforms that stretch along the street, with their roofs of boughs, and carpeted with clean matting, are pleasant enough. But far less satisfactory was the struggle made by the owners for our patronage; for no sooner did we approach than we were beset by a horde of men yelling and shouting in Kermanji, Persian, Turki, and Arabic. They seized the bridles of our horses, and attempted by main force to drag us to their several abodes, until it was only by free use of our long-lashed *chapar* whips that we escaped their clutches, and even then not until two of our bridles had been broken in the struggle. Refusing the proffered hospitality of all who had joined in the row, I wended my way to the last house of all, no member of which had interfered with us, and there we dismounted. Nor was I wrong, for not only was our welcome sincere, and everything done that was within the reach of the poor people to render our stay comfortable, but I found that the house belonged to a widow with a large family, who, unable to join in these wholesale struggles to obtain customers, plied but little trade. Here we rested for the day, tired and worn out with our long ride, while our horses were enabled to lie down and sleep in a cool stable.

It was not long before the heat drove us from the shady verandah to seek cooler quarters within doors, and our few goods and chattels being moved, we remained within until the afternoon.

Before sunset we made a start, and hot as the afternoon was, we travelled fast, though we seemed to be alone upon the road, most caravans preferring to wait until after sunset to make a start. Our road led us for some way along the valley, and then proceeded over undulating ground to Kirrind, a picturesque little town lying in the very mouth of a precipitous gap in the mountains, through which the Kirrind Chai—further on known as the Kura Su—flows. This place is the capital of the Kirrind Kurds, who, however, are by no means an interesting people to-day, for so far have they adopted Persian manners and customs that little remains of their better Kurdish characters. Even in dress they mimic the Persian, though most of them still wear a low felt cap and gaudy turban, showing their Kurdish origin. Extortion, and the fact that through their territory runs this important caravan-route, has no doubt tended to denationalise them,—and even in religion they have left the simple Sunni doctrine for the most mystic cult of the Sheiyas. This district, too, is a stronghold of the Ali Illahis.

Regarding this sect of the Ali Illahis but little is

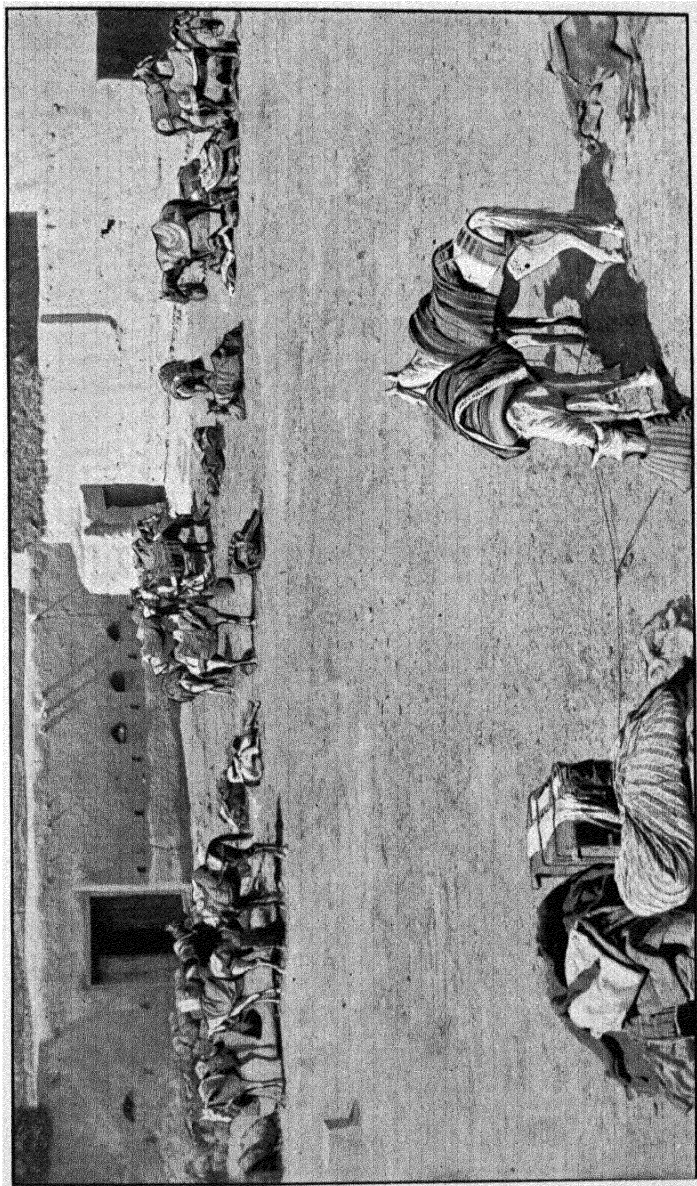


known, for their doctrine forms a cult that is kept secret and never revealed. The people themselves refuse to speak of it, and the ignorance and bigotry of their neighbours prevent one obtaining any information beyond the general remark that they practise unlawful rites, though I believe for this statement the only evidence that can be adduced is that during certain mystic meetings men and women mix freely, and the outside world is debarred from entering. The main point of their religion, however, is the belief that Ali was but a form taken by the Deity, one of the many incarnations He affected, of which Benjamin, David, and Jesus Christ may be mentioned. These incarnations of God they reckon as 1001 in number,—this, no doubt, having a vague connection with the 101 attributes of God in the Moslem belief to-day, the figures 101 and 1001—and also 99—being considered as signs of infinity, as it were, a recurring decimal. Mixed up in this assortment of Judaism and Islam appear signs of pagan origin in the persons of the Haft Tun, or seven spiritual directors of mankind. In my journey through the Yemen in 1891 I came across a sect very similar to this, the Makarama, of the highlands near Menakha, who shared amongst the Moslem population the same evil reputation of practising incest. The followers of this belief live at perfect peace and in happy accord with their neigh-

bours, nor is any difference noticeable either in their everyday lives or general habits, and on more than one occasion it was not until after leaving a village of these people that I was told that they were of the sect of Ali Illahis.

We saw but little of Kirrind beyond its outline in the moonlight, for we turned aside to enter an extemporised zareba, where our horses were picketed, while we supped under an arbour of boughs of trees supported on poles. The scene was a picturesque one, as any bivouac in the East generally is, for a number of Arab and Kurdish caravan-men had lit fires in the large enclosed square, and were cooking their supper and warming themselves by the fitful glare of the flames. Beyond, the leafy tops of the trees showed up in dark patches against the sky, brilliant with clear moonlight and a myriad stars. Every now and then some songster in the party would raise his voice, pouring out one of those strange sad melodies that one hears so often in Kurdistan.

At eleven o'clock the same night we started again, but riding was for a time impossible, so thickly was the track strewn with stones. As we proceeded the country became wilder, and we passed through a valley with steep rocky cliffs on either side of us. Nothing could have been worse than the road, which in this part proceeded along the river-bed, over



IN A PERSIAN CARAVANSERAI.



boulders and stones amongst dense bushes of oleanders. For hours we toiled on, often enough losing the path altogether, and wandering afield until called back to the right track by the bells of the camels or mules of some passing caravan. It was a weary march, for riding, except in a few places, was impossible, and we were obliged to walk and lead our horses. At length dawn appeared, and the dark valley in which we were travelling became visible, for the moon had sunk some time before below the high precipitous cliffs that bounded us on the right and left. It seemed as though the end of that valley would never be reached, for though the distance is by no means very great, so many obstacles strew the way and so rough is the road that any but the slowest of travelling is out of the question. As the sky showed signs of coming day, in spite of weariness one could not but admire the scene. The track follows the river-bed in the centre of the valley, from the stony banks of which rise up densely-wooded slopes, ending in precipices of pointed rock far above. Sunrise found us at Mian-Lek, at an altitude of over 4000 feet above the level of the sea, showing that we had already during the night descended some 1200 or 1300 feet from Kirrind. The village of Mian-Lek is a picturesque little spot, standing at the end of the valley amongst a little cultivated land gorgeous at

this period with wild hollyhocks. Trees flourish in the vicinity, and I hoped as we approached that this would be our resting-place; but the Arab who accompanied us pressed me so much to continue, in order to regulate the length of our marches beyond, that I felt constrained to do so, although Yusef had already fallen no less than three times from his horse through going to sleep, fortunately without much damage. Mohammed, however, was wide awake and in shouts of laughter at Yusef's swaying figure, as, overcome with fatigue, he rolled to and fro in the saddle until the climax arrived in a fall, and his horse standing still that he might mount again. I myself must plead guilty to having felt extremely weary and sleepy. My experience of night travelling—and it is by no means a small one—has made me arrive at the following conclusions: That fatigue begins to be felt about 1 A.M. and lasts until sunrise, when the coming of the day, the necessary change in the appearance of everything, and the awaking of life, dispels all feeling of lassitude, which again, however, begins to assert its sway a couple of hours or so later.

So we did not rest at Mian-Lek, but continued our road amongst sparsely-grown woods until, reaching the head of the famous pass—the Gate of Zagros—we commenced the long descent. The road winds down first along the head of the valley and then on

its northern face, turning and twisting so as to render as easy as possible for traffic the descent of 1000 feet. For the greater portion of the way the road is roughly paved, a memorial of the vast work of early days, when the very path existing to-day formed the great highway from Media into Babylonia. How many great armies and great kings of the olden times have passed up and down it would be impossible to enumerate. About a third of the way down on the right of the road is a white marble arch, extremely plain in feature, and in tolerable preservation. Several traditions are current as to its origin, but on none can much reliance be placed. In spite of the fact that more than one writer claims for this antique arch a reputation of beauty and architectural effect, it seemed to me an exceedingly ordinary building, much the same in design as those that play no little part in children's boxes of bricks. In all probability a statue or inscription stood within the archway, for the back is walled up, and by no possibility could the road at any time have passed under it. The only ornament discernible to-day is along the frieze, and most of this now lies on the roadside nearly. Strange as it seems in oriental countries, a large gang of men were at work repairing the road, and building at one spot, where it follows the edge of the precipice, a low wall to prevent accidents, which in the case of a crowd of

caravan animals are common enough. Apart from the interest of this being an ancient highway there is but little to admire in the way of scenery, for although some of the mountains are more or less covered with trees and brushwood, the general appearance of the country is desolate and barren. More especially is this so in looking down the valley, for here one's eye wanders on to the commencement of the plains of Babylonia, rolling away in rocky ridges of no great altitude and extreme aridity into the hazy distance. It was no difficult matter to see that by this descent we were leaving behind the elevated plateau of Persia and descending towards the bed of the Tigris, and it was with a sigh that I turned back to look at our last glimpse of the mountains and the trees preparatory to entering upon the dreary desert, where, as we were already beginning to feel, the cruel heat of June would try our bodies, our tempers, and our horses. The river does not flow through the same valley as the road descends by, but has cut its way through a deep romantic gorge a mile or two to the south, where it rushes down in falls and cataracts and deep pools between high precipices of rock.

Near the foot of the pass we reached the wretched Kurdish village of Pat-i-Tak, more miserable than usual at this time, for almost the entire population had sought their summer grazing-lands in the moun-



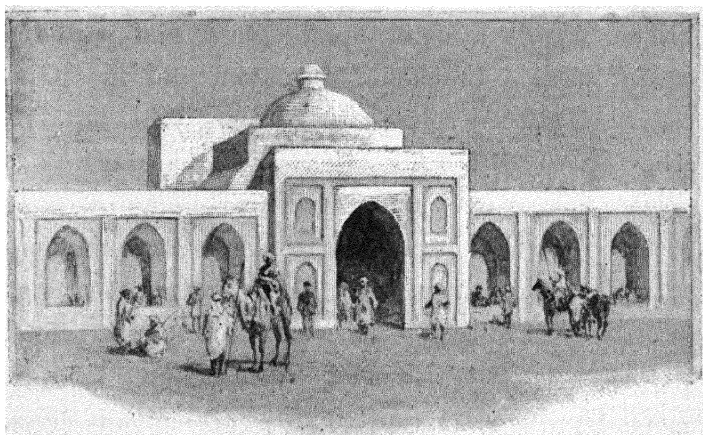
tains. No doubt the long line of Kurds—men, women, and children, with their tents and goods and chattels on the backs of donkeys and cattle, with their ferocious half-starved dogs and great flocks and herds—that we had met near the head of the pass consisted of the inhabitants of this inhospitable village. A few people, however, remained, and these had deserted their hovels, on account of the vermin with which these dens are swarming in summer, for roughly built arbours, before one of which we dismounted at 8.30 A.M., having been sixteen hours on the road, with only one rest of two hours at Kirrind. The heat under the thin covering of brushwood was terrific, nor was there any shelter for our horses, who stood, poor beasts, dripping with foam in the fierce sunlight. Of all our many days of travel on this long journey this was the most trying. Sleep was out of the question, for the heat was too intense; flies and vermin worried one in their fierce onslaughts; food was scarce and bad, and even the water was too hot to drink. What the thermometer must have stood at in that scanty shelter at the bottom of the hot and barren valley I cannot say, but this I know, that when later on in the Persian Gulf the mercury reached 105° and over, it was cool compared to that day at Pat-i-Tak. The poor peasants who were our hosts did everything they could for our comfort by build-

ing up walls of matting to keep the heat out, but even they were suffering intensely from the furnace-like blast.

At four o'clock we left, and though the temperature had fallen little, if at all, it was a relief to be on horse-back, and knowing at all events that we were progressing toward our destination.

Our road led us through dreary country, now across a valley where some cultivation was possible, and then again over bare rock and burning clay. A rift in a line of rocky hills leads one into a second valley, and near the entrance there are some remains of a building, a cave, and a sculptured tablet. In the cave, known as "David's Forge," the psalmist is still supposed by the Ali Illahis to reside, and this spot is accordingly the scene of many pilgrimages on the part of that curious sect that have through centuries managed to keep their cult a secret. A mile or two beyond one arrives at Sar-i-pul, and as the sun was just setting and the moon would not rise for some hours, we decided to rest there a while. The village of Sar-i-pul is a place of some size, situated on the Haluan river, for the most part on its right bank. Crossing a rather handsome brick bridge and passing between rows of houses, for the most part serving as caravanserais or *cafés*, we proceeded to the handsome khan of the place, one of the largest and in best con-

dition on the road between Kermanshah and Baghdad. A high domed archway gives entrance to the large courtyard, round which are recesses in all the walls, with raised platforms within, on which the traveller spreads his rug—if he has one. Feeding our horses and tethering them before us, we selected one of these arched recesses to repose in, but found, even though



*Khan at Sar-i-pul.*

the sun had now set, that the heat radiated from the bricks was so intense as to render resting there impossible. So we preferred the bare soil, and there cooked our supper, Yusef bringing us a tray of tea and big bowls of curdled milk from a *café* near by, while Mohammed and I plucked a fowl and cooked it, and the Arab who had accompanied us from Kerman-

shah looked after the wants of our three horses and his own mule—especially the latter.

A great crowd of pilgrims were here, some 300 or 400 in all, returning from the holy shrines near Baghdad. They were nearly all Turkis of Hamadan, Tehran, and Tabriz; but even as far away as this, most of the mule-drivers were Turkmans. In the centre of the courtyard of the khan stands a tiny mosque, merely a small square room, and here the *mueddin* called the hour to prayer, and the pious Sheiyas cried their salutations to Ali. What added a certain charm to the already picturesque *ensemble* of pilgrims, horses and mules, and sparkling fires, were a quantity of fireflies that flitted here and there in the air like tiny stars. My Moor, Mohammed, had never in his life seen such wonderful things before, and was lost in astonishment. Otherwise up till now he had never shown much enthusiasm at anything, except at the unbounded hospitality of the Kurds, which delighted his Arab soul. Even Ararat with its glistening snow had failed to attract him; the railway from Batum to Tiflis had missed its usual effect upon one who had never seen such a thing as a train before; the bazaars at Tabriz had created no impression; but here at last he sat open-mouthed and delighted—at the fireflies!

As soon as the moon rose we started afresh. The

night was hot, but travelling pleasant enough, though our road over rough rocky hills was dreary in the extreme. At dawn we reached Kasr-i-Shirin—"Shirin's Castle"—and found quarters in a tolerably decent khan near the further end of the village. The place is a large one and seems in tolerably flourishing circumstances, the bazaars being well supplied and by far the largest we had come across since leaving Kermanshah. A descent brings one into a large street, lined on either side by arches, under which the people sell their country and other produce. The Haluan Chai flows at the lower end of the little town, below a high mound which is crowned with a large building, once, it is said, the home of a plundering Kurdish chief, whose raids in the neighbourhood rendered traffic on the road impracticable. At the east end of Kasr-i-Shirin are the high walls of a once important town, together with the ruins of other strong and large buildings.

Of these ruins I saw but little. We had travelled all night and passed them at dawn, when, tired and weary, I made no attempt at exploring them, nor during the day was such a course possible owing to the heat. But I cannot pass on without a word as to the tradition regarding the aqueduct near by, for no one can travel in Persia without hearing a dozen times at least the favourite story of Ferhad of Shirin.

Ferhad was a famous sculptor in the reign of Chosroes II. (Parviz), who lived about the middle of the third century A.D., and to him are attributed the sculptures at Tak-i-Bostan, near Kermanshah. However, that is beside the question. Now Chosroes Parviz was suspected of Christianity, and is said to have wedded a beautiful Christian girl of the name of Shirin, or Sira; but whatever her religion may have been, she became apparently deeply enamoured of Ferhad and he of her. Evidently in those more enlightened days the kings did not cut off the heads of their young women who preferred others to themselves, and so Shirin was promised to Ferhad if he could cut in the solid rock an aqueduct that would bring the water to the palace, the ruins of which have given the name of "Kasr Shirin" to this spot. This, after several years of labour, he did, and then the king changed his mind about parting with the lady, and just as Ferhad was cutting the last sod, sent his apologies and said he regretted greatly, but the lady was dead. Ferhad, like an idiot, believed him, and jumped over the precipice and was dashed to pieces, and Shirin was inconsolable—or consoled herself with some one else, it doesn't much matter which. Such is the romantic tale of Ferhad and Shirin.

There is but little to remark about the scene of this tradition as it remains to-day, for, in spite of its

market, the town is poor enough, and of no importance practically, except from the fact that coming from Baghdad it is the first Persian place across the frontier, which lies only a few miles away to the west.

A guard of four soldiers was sent to escort us on the next stage of our road, but as I had been told by the head of the police (!) that only two were coming, I soon got rid of a couple of them by stating that I should only pay the same bakshish to four as to two, whereupon the two who had a right to be there packed the others off upon their business. These Persian ruffians—Kurds by birth—answer to the zaptiehs on the Turkish side, for from the frontier to Baghdad we were always accompanied by one or two,—a necessary precaution, as the country is infested with mounted Arabs, and they make no hesitation in plundering a traveller, but are scared of the zaptiehs, who, from their local knowledge, are as likely as not to recognise the marauder or his horse.

Crossing the Haluan at the foot of the hill on which the Kurdish robber-castle stands, we passed some gardens and proceeded out into the open country an hour or so before sunset. Again our escort tried extortion by declaring that they were to be changed at a village half-way to the frontier, and that others would come on from there, whereupon I was again obliged to give them notice that I intended only to

pay a certain sum as far as the frontier, and that the more guards there were the smaller the share of each would be. Then they laughed and came all the way. The night was dark by this time, for the moon had not yet risen, when suddenly a halt was called on the summit of a low hill. Then one of my escort rode a hundred yards ahead and hailed some one or something—it was too dark to see what. Then from the far away a voice replied, and my guards bidding us ride slowly on, pocketed their bakshish and turned back. In the darkness it was almost impossible to keep the track, so implicitly had we followed our guards up to now, and Yusef was already mumbling prayers and warnings as I led our little party on. Then a man hailed us and showed a light, and ten minutes later, after scrambling up a rocky path, we arrived at the frontier tower of Turkish territory, and were warmly welcomed by the Kurdish commander of the picket, who ordered tea, while our horses were led away to feed in a stable near by; for, as the headman told us, it would not be safe to continue our journey until after moonrise.

The hour or two passed pleasantly enough, and as the moon appeared over the hill our new zaptiehs mounted and led the way, we following. At midnight a long dark line on the level plain was pointed out to us as Khanikin, where we were to rest for the follow-



ing day, and half an hour later, after passing between some walled gardens, we drew up at the gate of a large caravanserai. The zaptiehs by beating the door managed to awake the guard within, and we rode into the great square khan in the bright moonlight. The owner, awakened and led forth by our escort, did all in his power to make us comfortable, and in a short time, having seen our horses watered and fed, we lay down to sleep on the flat roof of the arcade which surrounded the building.

The only importance that the little town of Khani-kin can claim is owing to the fact that it stands so near the frontier, and forms the customs and quarantine station of all traffic of the highroad between Persia and Baghdad.

With regard to this frontier of Turkey and Persia a few words must be said. In 1843, in order to prevent a war between these two countries, the British and Russian Governments held a frontier commission at Erzerum, in Turkish Kurdistan, in order that the questions at issue might be discussed. This conference ended in the Treaty of Erzerum in 1847, and two years later the actual delimitation commenced. Two events, however, prevented any very satisfactory results being arrived at—first, the seizure of Kotur by the Turks, and the driving out of the Persian garrison of that place, a small town to the north-west

of Lake Urmiah; and second, the breaking out of the Crimean war. With various attempts at a settlement, and many intervening quarrels, the matter again came to the fore at the Conference of Berlin in 1878. However, in spite of the fact that the question was settled upon paper at that date, the greatest ill-feeling still exists upon the subject, and the two countries are always ready to fly at one another's throats. Probably they would scarcely ever reach one another, as the wild Kurds, released for a time from their present state of an appearance of law and order, would merely loot on their own account. The Kurds of Persia, on account of their being Sunnis, would join the Turks, for even in Persian Kurdistan they recognise the Sultan Abdul Hamid as their Caliph. Anyhow, there would be such an upset that no good could possibly accrue to either side, and so matters have been allowed to remain as they are—that is to say, a vague frontier not in the least recognised by the Kurds who dwell near it, and who are to all intents and purposes not only robbers, but absolutely independent of either Sultan or Shah, and who would escape, were punishment for violence threatened by either ruler, by asserting that they were the subjects of the rival. In civilised countries such frontier questions would have to be cleared up, but between two decaying Powers like those in question the present state of

affairs seems to be somewhat of a safeguard against war.

It was almost a relief to be told that there was nothing to be seen in Khanikin, nevertheless the heat by day necessitated our resting there until the evening, when travelling would again be possible. Some small formalities, too, had to be gone through with the quarantine officials; but they were carried out with great ease and facility, and without even any attempt to extort bakshish.

The caravanserai in which we had taken up our quarters was a large building, with a number of small rooms over its high-arched gateway, while the great court was surrounded by a roofed arcade. All around were gardens of date-palms, the first we had seen on our whole journey, for the climate of north-west Persia is not sufficiently mild to allow of their being grown there. Here, however, no extreme of cold is ever felt, for we had descended to an altitude of about 1000 feet above the sea-level.

Leaving the caravanserai before sunset, we crossed a handsome bridge on the Haluan river, which flows through the centre of the town, and passing through one or two streets, with well-to-do-looking houses on both sides, soon emerged into the desert again. Three hours' good going brought us to Kalaa, where our zaptiehs were changed, the two returning to Khanikin,

while two fresh ones accompanied us on the remainder of our night's march. We reached Kizil-Rabat at eleven that night, passing amongst walled gardens, the palms showing up in clear relief against the moon-lit sky. For a while our way led through a vast but shallow pool of water, but whether from rain or the overflow of some stream or conduit it was impossible to discover in the darkness. At this spot we passed a large caravan of camels, splashing through the otherwise perfectly still water, and creating a thousand diamond-like drops at every step, while ever-widening circles of reflected moonlight sprang into existence to die away again in the watery expanse. The clanging bells and voices of the caravan-men added to form as oriental a scene as imagination could invent.

We rested an hour at Kizil-Rabat, at a *café* there, where some supper was prepared for us, and where we fed the horses, and then started once more. At sunrise, having changed our zaptiehs again at a spot where a guard had been quartered in tents on account of many recent robberies, we reached Shaharaban at sunrise, having been exactly twelve hours on the road, with little more than one hour's rest. Here the heat was extreme, and even in the deepest recesses of the arcade of the caravanserai where we rested, little or no relaxation could be found, nor were the flies less

troublesome. However, before the heat became too oppressive, I sauntered out with Mohammed and sought an Arab *café* near by, where we sat for a while on clean armed and backed divans of wood, sipping our black coffee from little cups. The owner of the place was here, there, and everywhere with his copper-brass coffee-pot, replenishing now one customer's cup, now another. There were many types of Arabs to be seen, but of these I shall have more to say in my description of Baghdad.

The bazaar of Shaharaban is a poor place, the roof of matting supported on palm trunks, and I noticed only one curiosity in them, and that was the matches, the boxes of which, one and all, bore the inscription "Made in Japan." And very good they were too, in spite of the fact that they can be bought at this remote quarter of the globe, after the long journey by sea and river to Baghdad and thence by caravan, for  $\frac{1}{4}$ d. a box.

In looking through my notes on my journey, I find jotted down the account of our morning's marketing, and at the risk of stirring up the envy of every housekeeper into whose hands this book may fall, I copy out the items here: 6 oranges,  $\frac{1}{2}$  lb. rice, 2 cups of tea, 3 onions, and 2 lb. meat; total equivalent to 4d. in English money.

From Shaharaban to Bakuba the road offered no

features worthy of notice, except that there exists a *café* half-way between the two, where refreshment can be obtained for man and horse, and that at times on the road we passed and crossed little canals carrying water to irrigate the various cultivated spots scattered about upon these rich plains, which years of neglect have turned into a howling wilderness. Including the hour or so we spent at the half-way caravanserai, we took eleven hours to come the distance between Shahraban and Bakuba, arriving at the latter place at dawn.

Bakuba is surrounded on almost all sides by luxuriant gardens, the tops of palm, orange, pomegranate, fig, and mulberry trees appearing above their walls, and of the latter fruit we obtained a quantity. The town is a poor enough little place, but we were able to engage a decent upper room in a caravanserai, from the window of which a view of the main street and the entrance to the bazaar was obtainable. The latter seems to consist almost entirely of *cafés*, and in fact the little importance the place can lay claim to is owing to the passing of caravans.

The heat again by day was terrific. June was nearing its close now, and the time for travelling in comfort was long past. Even sleep was impossible, so stifling was the air and so noisome the

flies. It was a relief when at last the time came to make a start.

Riding through the bazaar, we emerged from Bakuba on to the bank of the Diala river, which is crossed by an old pontoon bridge, rather shaky and dilapidated, but better than any ferry. A few gardens stand on the farther bank of the river, but the barren plain is reached almost at once, with nothing to break the landscape but telegraph poles and the banks of long-forgotten canals.

Half-way between Bakuba and Baghdad we stopped to drink coffee and rest ourselves and our horses before setting off on our final stage.

## CHAPTER XIII.

BAGHDAD IN 1895.

A STRANGE grey light hung over the plain—that luminous effect which is produced when dawn approaches, and the moon is still high in the heavens. Then it is that one can watch one's shadow, thrown by the moon, gradually grow more and more indistinct, until at length it dies away altogether, to reappear on the other side as dawn brightens the eastern sky.

This last night was the crowning one of our march, for, as dawn lit up the east, we descried—dimly at first, but clearer and more clearly as we proceeded—the minarets of a city before us. Then the walls became visible, and at length, shortly before sunrise, our jaded cavalcade of three men and three horses crawled through one of the city gates into Baghdad, the City of the Caliphs.

A sentry at the entrance of the town sought to examine the scanty baggage our horses bore strapped



to our saddles, but desisted when he discovered that we were too weary either to aid him in unfastening our saddle-bags or to find him *bakshish*, and with a half-muttered curse he stepped back into the little guard-room under the tower of the gate.

Within, a wide open space, half covered with graves and half with vast heaps of rubbish, had to be crossed before the intricate streets and byways that lead to the more civilised quarters of Baghdad were reached. Already life was astir. Soldiers in gay blue cotton uniforms and red fezzes passed us in little bands, on their way to a review that was to be held without the walls at sunrise; quite a crowd of citizens, too, anxious to see the sight, grave in gait and demeanour; and half-naked urchins shouldering sticks and marching, impertinently imitating the passing troops; officers on horseback,—all sorts and conditions of men. But our hearts were set on other things, and we pressed on in silence, longing, as only travellers, after the weary marches of nights and days of travel, can long, for rest, and quiet, and sleep.

Then through the narrow alley-ways, with high houses on each hand, and on into the long colonnades of the bazaars, arched, and domed, and gloomy, now and again stopping to ask our way, until, after retracing our steps perhaps a dozen times, and seek-

ing in a new direction our destination, we arrived, guided by a merry soldier - youth whom a little bakshish had persuaded to risk being late at the review, at the one small hotel that Baghdad boasts for the entertainment of the traveller. But it was long before stabling was found for our steeds, though we had the satisfaction of seeing them watered and fed before our thoughts turned to our own sorry plight and the refreshment of our bodies.

I had travelled from North-Western Persia with no luggage, save what our own horses could carry strapped on behind the saddle, but to my joy I was able to purchase a shirt and a suit of clean white clothes at the hotel, and, these treasures obtained, we sought out a great Turkish bath in the near neighbourhood, where hot water and soap, the skilful hands of a masseur, and afterwards an hour's dozing over coffee and cigarettes, restored us to a frame of equanimity and peace with all men, and then sleep—in a real bed—hours and hours of dreamless sleep—and then again a real meal, with knives and forks !

. . . . .  
There are no doubt many people who imagine that Baghdad to-day bears many traces of the lavish hand of Harun er-Rashid and the succession of wealthy Abbaside caliphs who held the throne after him. One might almost expect, so remotely is the city

situated, that much that rendered it once one of the most important and wealthiest centres of trade and art would still be extant. So of the old world does the name of Baghdad sound in one's ears that its very mention calls up in one's mind a vague remembrance of the thousand and one tales of the 'Arabian Nights' Entertainment,' glimpses of palaces of gold and jewels, visions of genii and magic carpets. Those who have not already discovered that such is a delusion and a snare had better close these pages here, for, alas! the writer has but little to tell of except the commonplaces of oriental life. Yet even the most casual traveller, be he a lover of the East and its strange half-remembered traditions and its curious trains of thought, can find in the dust and ashes and ruins a certain charm that may never have existed in the old days, and can refashion for himself the glories of that period of art and enlightenment according to the desires of his own imagination; for still to-day, as then, the great Tigris sends its turbid yellow waters along its ancient course, the palm-groves fringe the river's banks, and even here and there some half-ruined minaret or airy dome of iridescent faïence, suffice for the threads on which to embroider one's mental tapestries. But when one turns one's eyes, however hastily, to the history of this great city, one ceases once for all to wonder that

to-day decay and ruin reign supreme, for few places in the world have seen the vicissitude of life that Baghdad has done, alternate prosperity and devastation—until one wonders that the courage of man has been sufficient ever to rebuild where man has so often overturned. And where human agency has failed Time has laid his indelible seal, for the city is built of brick and clay, and, excellent as the climate is to preserve, the durability of such material is not great, for the natives never seem to have known that secret of clay and bitumen which has left Ctesiphon, the palace of the Arsacidæ and Sassanian monarchs, some twenty miles away down the river, to rebuke the ephemeral efforts of Persian and Arab. Some idea of what Baghdad has suffered can be gathered from the few lines which follow regarding its unhappy history.

Founded by the Caliph el-Mansur in A.D. 764-767, Baghdad remained for nearly five hundred years the principal seat of learning, trade, and art in the East, and a succession of wealthy caliphs added each some new glory to its already abundant works of art. The first to initiate the scheme for rendering this city the capital of the world was Harun er-Rashid, who reigned from A.D. 786 to 809. But in A.D. 1258 there swept over Persia and Mesopotamia an invasion of wild Mongol tribes, led by the Emperor Hulaku,

grandson of the famous Yenghis Khan, and the palaces and public buildings which it had taken the dynasty of Abbaside rulers five centuries to erect, were destroyed by fire and axe, and the long line of caliphs cut off. This destruction by the Mongols was destined to be followed by another even more terrible, for like a second wave this portion of Asia was overswept by the wild Turkmans under Timur — or Tamerlane—and in A.D. 1400 the city was taken, and the reigning sultan driven out. Seventeen years later it was again besieged by Turkmans, this time under Kara Yusef, chief of the tribe of Kara Koyunlu. For sixty years the family of this chieftain held the throne, until in fact they in turn were driven out by Usum Kasim in 1477, whose reign of thirty-nine years was cut short by Shah Ismail I., who founded the royal house of Sefe in 1516 A.D. Sultan Suleiman I. of Turkey was the next aggressor, and added the city to his already vast domains in 1544 A.D., but in 1602 it reverted to Persia after its capture by the troops of the famous Shah Abbas. But disturbances at home rendered it open to further reconquest, and the Turks, under Murad IV., regained its possession in 1638. Since that period, with many vicissitudes, it has nominally remained under the jurisdiction of the Osmanli Sultans, and its government was reorganised and its position in the empire

made clear after the termination of the Russo-Turkish war.

It is not to be marvelled that a city which in the course of a few centuries has been the scene of so much pillage, warfare, and destruction, should to-day boast little of what once gave it a title to being, perhaps, the greatest capital in Asia, and certainly the greatest emporium of trade in the world.

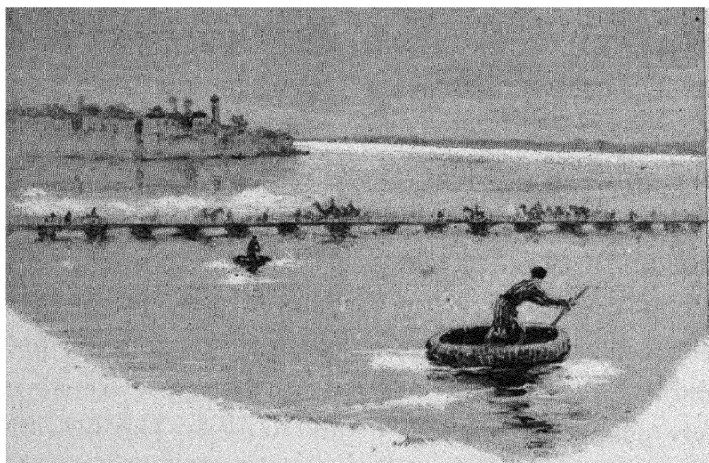
Nor to-day, in spite of the inefficiency of its Government, is the trade of Baghdad an unimportant one, for difficult as it is to collect any satisfactory information regarding its statistics where either Turk or Persian is concerned, a rough estimate of the value of the exports and imports that pass through Baghdad annually for transportation by caravan into or from Persia, gives a result of about half a million of pounds (Turkish), and it is stated that from 24,000 to 28,000 mules and pack-horses are employed as beasts of burden upon this route. The merchandise, on arriving, is discharged from the large steamers at Busra, and conveyed for the intervening 300 miles by river-steamers, of which two companies exist, one English and the other Turkish. The transshipment at Busra is made direct, and the customs dues, 8 per cent *ad valorem*, are levied at Baghdad, of which on goods proceeding into Persia 7 per cent is repaid at Khanikin, near the frontier.

But it is neither with the trade nor the history of Baghdad that the writer is concerned here, for in the many excellent books of reference that to-day enable the public to gain information on these and like subjects full particulars can be found. Rather it is his object to attempt to conjure up in the eyes of the reader some idea of Baghdad as it exists to-day, a city of narrow alleys and shady bazaars, of tiled mosques and crumbling houses.

Probably the population of Baghdad does not reach to-day much over 100,000 persons, but here again no satisfactory statistics are forthcoming; but, whatever the actual number may be, it can be safely stated that almost all the nationalities of the world can be found living within its walls. Arabs, Persians, Turks, Europeans, Jews, oriental Christians of many races and denominations, Afghans, Indians, Africans, Turkmans, and Kurds are met daily in the bazaars, engaged in trade or manual labour, or visiting the neighbouring shrine of some long defunct saint.

Before, however, entering upon the description of any particular portion of the city, some general idea must be gathered of its situation. Baghdad, the capital of the vast pashalik of the same name, lies on both banks of the Tigris, about 500 miles from the mouth of that river in the Persian Gulf, and some 300 above Busra, which is to all intents and purposes

its port. The main part of the city is built on the left bank of the Tigris, the quarter on the west side being to-day little more than a suburb, though in all probability at one time the more important. Both portions are walled, but the condition of these walls is one of decay, sufficient perhaps to withstand attack from badly armed and ill-trained Arab hordes,



*Bridge of Boats over the Tigris at Baghdad.*

but scarcely worthy of consideration as a defence from a well-organised foe armed with artillery. It is on the eastern side that the foremost buildings, the bazaars and principal mosques, are to be found; and here too, along the bank of the river, are most of the residences of the European Consuls and merchants. A bridge of boats connects the two towns, a rough



wooden causeway upheld upon pontoons, of which there are some five-and-thirty. It is from this bridge that the most promising view of Baghdad is obtained, for one's eyes wander both up and down the stream of the Tigris, here some 300 yards in width. Certainly there is no other point of vantage whence Baghdad presents an appearance so imposing, for not only does the great river add an immense charm to the scene, but also the finest residences the town can boast, and the most picturesque, stand upon the left bank. On one's right, as he turns his sight down-stream, lies the old city, its dull yellow buildings indistinct in outline from the irregularity of their building and their monotony of colour, stretching out great latticed windows towards the still yellow river. Amongst the houses, both above and below the bridge, are the great forests of date-palms that line both banks of the Tigris in the vicinity of the city; and here and there one obtains peeps of orange and pomegranate trees, often only their heads visible over the high garden walls. Above the town, both to east and west, rise the domes and minarets of the mosques, breaking the flat outline of the level roofs of the terraced houses. Nor is the stream itself devoid of interest, for some way down below the bridge lie the steamers that ply upon its waters between this spot and Busra, while nearer

at hand are the sailing-boats with their elevated sterns and enormous rudders, and here, there, and everywhere dodge the *kufas*, those strange basket-and-pitch coracles peculiar to the Tigris. The utility of these strange craft is soon appreciated, for the river flows at a speed of from four to seven knots an hour, a rate that renders impossible, or at least most difficult, the manœuvring of ordinary row-boats. But these flat-bottomed light basket craft draw so little water that the skilful native boatmen can obtain quite a creditable speed against the swiftest current. With the exception of the dug-out canoes of other portions of the world, these *kufas* can probably boast an origin as early as any, for they are found represented in ancient sculptures and bas-reliefs in exactly the same form as they exist to-day. Their construction is simple enough—merely a basket of pomegranate twigs covered with a thick coating of bitumen, of which there are springs in the neighbourhood of the river-banks.

A short walk from the east end of the bridge takes one to the bazaars, and these the lovers of study of Eastern people's ways and customs will find the great attraction of Baghdad, for so private is the home life of the people that it is practically impossible to gain any idea of what sort of an existence is lived within doors. It is therefore to the bazaars

that the traveller must resort in order to gain any insight into the character of the inhabitants of Baghdad. There are miles of the great covered arcades, miles of the arches and domes, under which all the native trade of the city is carried on. Some of these bazaars are new and in tolerably good repair, others are begrimed with the dust of ages, while others again never boasted a roofing of brick at all, and are dependent for shade upon a covering of mats and palm thatch supported on the trunks of date-trees, for no other timber exists, all doors and woodwork for building purposes being imported. As in nearly all oriental cities, each trade has its own bazaar, the largest and best being given up to the vendors of manufactured goods—largely European and Indian—and the sellers of old wares, second-hand clothes, and crockery.

It is easy enough in almost all quarters of the globe to make friends with the little tradesmen who own shops in the bazaar, and I have found in all my travels that, so long as there is a language in common, the middle-class townsman is as ready to listen to the story of one's travels, and hear of the sights seen, as one is to gain information from him in turn; and by a little gentle pressure the usual reticence of the oriental is soon overcome, and he seems for the time being to take as great an

interest as oneself in what is going on before one's eyes. So it was in Baghdad that I used, by making some small purchase and sending for a couple of cups of coffee, and offering a cigarette, to find myself of a morning squatting in one of the boxlike shops, amongst a heap of old swords or pistols, or surrounded by neatly-folded rolls of cotton goods, asking questions and being asked others in return, and nowhere meeting with incivility. From such a coign of vantage as this the whole world of Baghdad could be seen passing before one. Rich town merchants in long garments of silk, half-concealed by their sashes of cashmere and the folds of the *abba*, or sleeveless cloak, which is so typical of this part of the East; Seyids and mollahs, with proud, unrelenting features and white complexions, robed in silks, and wearing turbans of neatly-folded white or dark-blue muslin; Turkish officers in broadcloth and gold-lace, with jingling spurs and swords; rough Kurdish *hammala*, porters, and carriers of heavy cases of merchandise; half-nude, laughing street urchins; private soldiers in their neat blue cotton uniforms and red fezzes, swaggering along hand in hand; African negroes; cringing Jews and Armenians, so difficult to tell apart, either in looks or character; Arabs from the country, with their soiled linen and faded *abbas* of brown or brown-and-white

stripes, their heads covered in coloured *kifiyehs*, the points of which hang over the back and shoulders, held in place by rolls of soft camel's hair; beggars, singing as they pass, often a long string of them, and blind; donkeys driven along with loud cries, bearing on their backs the freshly-filled skins of water; Arab Sheikhs on Arab horses, gay with bridles studded with silver plaques, and mounted on gaudy saddles, their belts full of arms; youths from the country, rich with some unlawful plunder, washed, and clean, and laughing, planning how best they can ill-spend their ill-gotten gains, intent upon the pleasures of the city; auctioneers vending all kinds of wares, from old embroidered clothes to modern revolvers, from brass candlesticks to cotton quilts,—all going to and fro, screaming, laughing, yelling, and quarrelling! And seen against a background of boxlike shops, gorgeous with brilliant goods, in the half-light of the arched and domed arcades, the bazaar is a sight indeed. Then, when one thinks he has seen all the world pass before him, there comes a long caravan of lumbering camels, grunting under their heavy loads, drowning the din with the clanging of the great bells that hang, half-hidden in trappings of wool and shells and tiny mirrors, round their necks; or a string of weary Persian pilgrims, some mounted on sturdy ponies driven by narrow-eyed Turkis from Northern

Persia, recognisable anywhere by their mushroom-like hats of strange shape and stranger dimensions, followed by a string of mules bearing in *kajavehs*, or wooden panniers, the women and children of the party, one and all intent upon their visit to Kerbela, and their pilgrimage to the shrine of their beloved Ali at Nejef.

Beyond the bazaars, past the great barracks and the mosque that overlooks the Maidan, with its minarets and domes of exquisite faïence, is the open space where the daily horse-market takes place, in summer before sunrise, at which hour the temperature in the open air is bearable. Here, along a wide road bounded on both sides by houses and great half-open *cafés*, and at one spot by the wall of a mosque, are arranged the wooden armed and backed couches on which the natives so love to recline. Rows and rows of these seats there are, whence one can witness the sale of horses; for the *delals*, or auctioneers, mounted on the steed they wish to sell, pass and repass, showing the paces of their respective animals. What a crowd there is, too, of a morning, of horse-dealers and Arabs from the country, of Turkish soldiers and townsmen, some intent upon buying or selling, but the greater part mere onlookers! Here, too, one can catch a glimpse now and again of some fine Arab horse, not for sale,

it is true, for the better breeds never appear in the open market, but purposely ridden through the crowd by the servant of some rich Turk or Arab, so that the bystanders may see it and admire its arching neck and fine legs after its morning gallop outside the city walls. Mules, camels, and donkeys can be purchased at this spot, too, the latter sometimes very fair specimens of the white Baghdad breed. It was here that I sold the horses that had carried my Arab servants and myself so well from Tabriz, and which we had purchased the previous April in that city. Poor little steeds, you did your work well, and may you reap the home you deserve so far away from your native land! Heartily sorry I was to part with them after they had carried us safely through so much of Persia and Persian Kurdistan, and the tear I choked in my throat beamed in poor Mohammed's eyes as for the last time he took their Kurdish saddles and bridles off, and we saw them led away captive by their new owners.

Then back to the town again, seeking some new bazaar or new street that we had not seen before, or perhaps wandering through the narrow smoke-filled alleys that twist and twine in a very labyrinth. On the little platform on each side of which the jewellers beat strange shapes out of gold and silver plates, there is little to see in their shops beyond the fires

and anvils on which they work ; but a word or a questioning look will cause the owner to dive to the depths of some old carved box or unlock some decrepid safe and litter the seat in front of him with heavy necklets, bracelets, and anklets of gold or silver, or display a set of tiny coffee-cups of the latter metal. Seen through the blue smoke, stirred from the grey embers of the fires by the little blow-pipes that they use, this bazaar is quaintly attractive. Here some jeweller is tempting a would-be bridegroom from the country with a pair of heavy silver bracelets ; here a woman enveloped from head to foot in a black or checked silk sheet, with a thick gauze covering for her face, is bargaining with an old Arab for some gold earrings she has brought for sale. A ray or two of sunlight piercing the half-timbered roof strikes brightly upon a glass-case of trinkets or the bright clothes of a shopman, forming a patch of brilliant colour in a scene the rest of which is a monotone of dull greys and browns.

Then back to spend the heat of the day at the one hostelry of Baghdad, stopping *en route* to admire the faïence border of the gate of some *medresseh* or mosque, or to decipher some Arabic or Kufic inscription at the entrance of a tomb, or to soothe one's limbs, weary with travel, in one of the many great baths that Baghdad boasts, where, after leaving the



octagonal chambers in which fountains of hot water are playing, one lies down upon cool slabs while the hands of a skilled masseur bring comfort to one's body; and finally the hour of rest, when, wrapped in the lightest of cotton sheets, one dawdles on carpeted divans over coffee and cigarettes, and conversation with one's neighbours.

The little hotel in Baghdad possesses a tiny garden and terrace that overhang the river, and here in such coolness as could be found in shady corners the curio-vendors would collect to show one their wares—modern armour from Ispahan, inferior carpets from anywhere in Persia or Kurdistan, pottery from China and Japan, and a host of rubbish; for it is difficult indeed for the collector to succeed in finding anything of great beauty or value in Baghdad nowadays. True, one is flooded with antiques, beads and seals and cylinders, bricks and inscriptions, from Babylon and the surrounding ruins, and still more often from the forgers' workshops. But such tempt only the connoisseur in matters Babylonian, and not the casual traveller. From the terrace of the hotel one could, too, envy the bronze-skinned youths and boys who splash and swim in the cool river. Expert they are, for often a whole shoal of them would cross from bank to bank, scarcely carried at all down the stream, though the current runs at a great pace.

The climate of Baghdad, though healthy enough, can scarcely be called an enjoyable one, for the terrible extreme of heat in summer is equalled by the damp and cold of winter, when the clay roads become seas of mud, and the old Arab houses fail to keep out the hurricanes of draughts. Then the European is confined to his house, for there is no temptation to wander over one's ankles in filth through chilly streets. But summer, too, has its disadvantages, when nothing will induce the thermometer to go below a hundred for days together. The sole relief then is in the *serdabs*, the cellar-like underground chamber, one of which every better-class house in Baghdad possesses. Damp, vault-like, gloomy rooms they are, with walls of brick and windows near the roof—cool, it is true, but with a churchyard coolness, that even the ever-swinging punkah fails to render fresh. But, severe as the heat is in summer, the European residents appear to suffer from it to no great extent, and maintain good health. There is one exception, however, to the general rule—the ill-favoured Baghdad boil or button, that is said, sooner or later, to attack all residents, and often even passers-by. Europeans, as a rule, are generally affected upon the arms or legs, and thus spared the facial disfigurement which follows the cousin of this complaint, the Aleppo button; but I saw

many cases of natives whose features were much marked. The sore often lasts a period of a year, but causes little or no pain. Its origin, like its cure, has never been discovered.

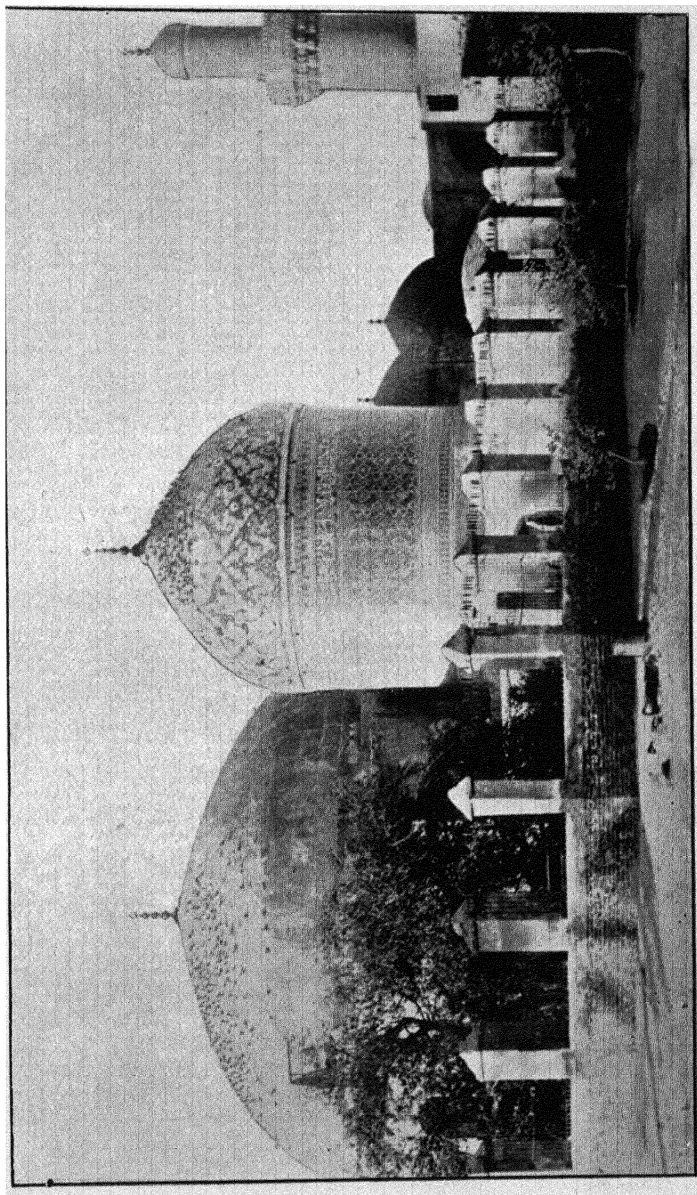
The ordinary form in which the houses of Baghdad are constructed is round an open courtyard, which is sometimes planted with trees. A gallery usually surrounds the court on the upper storey, the roof being supported on pillars of wood with carved capitals. On to this gallery all the upper rooms open, and generally not more than one room possesses windows looking into the street. In the case of the larger residences there is sometimes a series of these courtyards, and often one or more small gardens as well. In this case the rooms are rendered more healthy and light by large windows filled in with various forces of *musheribiyeh* or simpler trellis-work. Certainly the finest house I saw in Baghdad is the official residence of H.B.M. Consul-General, which served at one time as the palace of a wealthy Arab, and is now, I believe, the property of a native of India. It is a straggling building, consisting of several houses of various sizes, some connected with one another, and others entirely separate, in a garden, the terrace of which overlooks the Tigris. One courtyard, which in the days of its Moslem owners served as the harem, possesses some beautiful rooms, the

decoration of which has fortunately been allowed to remain. Here one can obtain some idea of the magnificence and art of the early Arab and Perso-Arabic work. The walls of most of the rooms contain niches of various designs, answering to cupboards in our modern life, the contents of which were no doubt hidden by small curtains of brocade and embroidery. Above these recesses, which are always small, runs a frieze in various styles of decoration, sometimes in bold designs of flowers in clear colours, at others of minute inlaid mirrors. The plaster ceilings are often beautifully moulded and picked out with like designs in these gem-like atoms of glass, the effect of the whole somewhat resembling the scales of a snake. No description can convey even an approximate idea of the delicacy and design of this style of decoration, which must be seen to be appreciated. It speaks much for the original workmen that this exquisite and fine work remains to-day intact. Certainly in artistic respects the old Arab house which serves as the British Consulate-General is a gem, and my recollections of its many attractions are enhanced by the pleasant and kind hospitality shown me during my visit by its inmates, Colonel and Mrs Mockler, for after busy days of wandering and sight-seeing in an oriental city, evenings in the company of charming people are delightful indeed. After

dinner we would resort to a raised terrace above the river, and enjoy the coolness of the night air. Away across the Tigris sparkled a few solitary lights from old Baghdad, on one occasion giving place to a most brilliant array of illumination, when a wealthy and important pasha gave an entertainment in his new palatial abode, which he has built on the right bank of the river. That evening was enlivened by the none too dulcet tones of a Turkish military band, which discoursed by no means sweet music on the pasha's terrace opposite. There we would sit, talking of many things and many places, until late at night, when, guided by a *kavas* with a lantern, I would seek my own quarters.

It would be but a wearying task for the reader were I to attempt to describe the many mosques that Baghdad possesses, for though each has some particular feature which may catch the eye of and attract the traveller, it would be but repetition to particularise. I visited several during my stay, but saw none more interesting than that raised over the tomb of Abdul Kader el Jilani, a saint who departed this life in the thirteenth century, and which dates from A.D. 1252. Nor does this much-reverenced shrine depend entirely upon its architectural features for its attraction, as it is a goal of pilgrimage for many a wild tribesman of Afghanistan and other

distant regions—for Abdul Kader is held in great reverence from Central Asia to Morocco—and within its precincts are to be seen strange long-haired figures, talking strange guttural tongues, and hailing from heaven knows where. The mosque being a Sunni shrine—that is to say, belonging to the orthodox and less fanatical division of Islam—Europeans are allowed to enter the great courtyard which surrounds the central building with its immense dome, though I noticed that my presence did not seem altogether to be appreciated by some of the scowling tribesmen. A covered arcade surrounds the great courtyard, at the corners of which rise minarets of yellow brick, the galleries and cupolas of which are decorated in exquisite faïence. Although the larger of the two domes consists of undecorated cement, a smaller one boasts, as far as colouring and design, the best tile-work and faïence in Baghdad, as does also the circular building which supports it. Exquisite in every way are the encircling patterns, from the white inscriptions on a deep blue ground to flowing coloured designs beneath. I was informed by one of the relations of the present Sheikh of Abdul Kader's shrine, that the reason of the great dome being left undecorated is because its size will not allow of its bearing the weight of the tiles. So beautiful is the glaze upon the surface of the smaller dome that in



THE SHRINE OF ABDUL KADER, BAGHDAD. (From a Photo by Colonel Mockler.)





viewing it against the brilliant blue of the sky it appears to be almost transparent, to such an extent does it catch the reflection of the heavens above, and so delicate are its own tints. The property pertaining to this wealthy mosque covers a great extent of ground, and all the money accruing from this source, as well as the offerings of the many pilgrims who frequent it, are utilised for keeping up the repairs of the buildings, the residue finding its way into the pockets of the lineal descendants of the great saint, who reside in a handsome house near by, where I was permitted to visit them. This mosque lies a long way from the bazaars and richer portion of the city, and to reach it one is obliged to thread the narrow alley-ways of streets that seem to be built for the sole purpose of perplexing the passer-by, so exactly do they resemble one another, and so often do they lead nowhere in particular, or end in a bare wall.

But even here there is much to interest and attract—sometimes a peep through an open doorway into the interior of a house, sometimes a pair of dark eyes uncovered for a moment at a latticed window. In the heat of the day it is seldom that one passes any one in these narrow byways, and when one does, it takes but a little imagination to believe that it is Harun er-Rashid in disguise, seeking information of

the welfare of his people. Poor Harun, you would return to weep at home, for the hand of the oppressor is heavy upon them, and poverty and misery have usurped your throne. Poor Harun er-Rashid! Decay and desolation have set their seal upon these outskirts of Baghdad, and crumbling walls and sightless windows meet one's gaze in every direction. Only one monument of very early days remains intact, for the minaret of the Eski mosque is in sad disrepair—the old Talismanic gate overlooking the fosse, which still bears an inscription, and the Arabic date corresponding to 1220 A.D. But it has long since ceased to serve its original purpose of a city gate, for Murad IV. walled it up after his conquest of the town in 1638 A.D., and to-day a tall flagstaff proclaims it to be a powder-magazine.

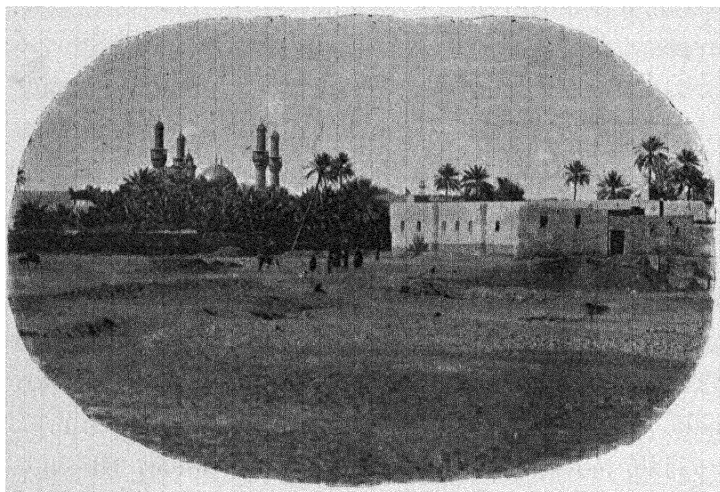
Without the walls of Baghdad there are but few excursions to be made in the near vicinity. To drive from the northern gate of the Eastern city to Imam Jawad, where there is a handsome Sunni mosque, to cross the Tigris there by a bridge of boats, and to return by tramway from Kazimin, is almost all that there is to tempt one to leave the city, with the exception of the longer excursion to Ctesiphon, which necessitates a whole day,—and in summer the heat renders this out of the question, as, even if the traveller could bear the sun, his horse could scarcely

do so for the thirty-six-mile ride there and back. But nothing could be pleasanter or better worth the time and trouble than a few hours spent at Imam Jawad and Kazimin, as the latter possesses one of the most magnificent and gorgeously decorated mosques in the East, though far inferior in wealth of colour and gilding to the more famous shrine at Kerbela.

A rickety vehicle, not unlike a small omnibus, took us from the gate of Baghdad to the little open square of Imam Jawad, where, as seems to be the custom whenever a *café* is passed, my native servant and I drank the favoured beverage. It is a pretty spot, surrounded by walled gardens, above the trees of which the minarets of the mosque that rises above the bones of the Imam Jawad stands out. Then on into its quiet courts, for the unfanatical Sunni allows the European to enter, admiring the lovely tilework of the dome, and the arcade which surrounds its square. Then down shady lanes which thread the gardens that line the banks of the Tigris, across the rickety bridge of boats, with the golden domes and minarets of Kazimin ever before one, glistening and glittering in the fierce afternoon sunlight.

Round the shrine of the Imam Musa a little town has sprung up, which, on account of the saint being particularly venerated by the followers of the Sheiya

division of Islam, contains a large population of Persians. In fact it is said that of the 6000 inhabitants at least 5000 hail from Persia. The town offers no attractions in itself, much resembling the poorer quarters of Baghdad. The one object for which it is celebrated, besides its shrine and mosque,



*Kazimin, near Baghdad.*

From a Photo by Colonel Mockler.

is the tramway-line which the only excellent pasha that Baghdad has seen for many years, Midhat, caused to be laid in 1870. In the centre of the town stands the wonderful mosque, with its gold-plated domes and minarets. A high wall encircles the great courtyard in which the building stands, large gateways of rich tile and carved woodwork

giving entrance. Through these doorways one is able to obtain a good general idea of the mosque within, though it must be only a passing glimpse, as a moment's delay will call down upon one's head a threat and a curse, or even a blow, from some Sheiya fanatic. From the view I obtained, now through one gate, now through another, the mosque appears to be one of great beauty, the walls of the principal building being entirely covered in magnificent examples of tilework and faïence of every hue and colour, yet blended with the most perfect taste.

From Kazimin one drives back by the tramway to old Baghdad, passing first through gardens of palms, and then across the open plain, where stands the solitary octagonal tower over the tomb of Zob-eida, the favourite wife of Harun er-Rashid.

Then leaving the tramway, one continues through the narrow tortuous streets of old Baghdad, and across the creaky bridge of boats to the more civilised portion of the town.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## THE VOYAGE HOME.

IT was not until after considerable delays that the steamer eventually left the quay at Baghdad. These delays, like the discomfort I was to suffer on the journey, were owing to the presence of a distinguished official, who held the post of Admiral of the Tigris, and by whom I found, in spite of assertions to the contrary, all the first-class accommodation had been engaged. There are two lines of river-steamer that ply upon the Tigris between Baghdad and Busra, of which far and away the best is the English; but the dates of departure did not suit me, and I found myself in for three days and three nights in the second-class accommodation of a dirty Turkish boat. As a matter of fact, I didn't care much. What, after the long journey we had made, mattered a few days more or less of dirt and discomfort? I had, however, been able to take one

precaution, and that was to bring with me a young Greek servant of Baghdad, who could attend to my wants upon the journey, and even cook my food, for there is no regular food supply upon the boats. Luckily I had been warned of this; and came on board fully prepared with a large basket of meat, vegetables, bread, fruit, and wine, the perishable articles to be replaced at the various little towns of call upon the journey.

The cabin put aside for my use was small and dirty, and contained two berths; but I found the captain and crew of the steamer willing, good-natured fellows, and a bucket of soap-suds and water soon improved the appearance of things. My bedding was quickly unpacked, and I settled in.

At dawn we passed the ruins of Ctesiphon, called by the natives Tak-i-Kesra, of which the remains of a grand façade and vaulted hall alone exist to tell of the marvellous building of the Arsacid and Sassanian monarchs. Nothing but a few mud-heaps are visible, however, on the site of the once so famous city which surrounded it; nor from the river can much be distinguished of the remains of the town of Seleucia, on the opposite bank. The great pile of yellow building, solitary on the vast plain, bears a most melancholy appearance, even though the morning sunlight showed everything at its best.

Anything more dreary than the scenery of the Tigris between Baghdad and Busra could not be imagined. To right and left stretch barren plains of baked clay, except where here and there vast fever-swamps, with gigantic rushes, take their place. Yet even both these types of desolation support life, human and otherwise, and on the banks, pitched in the blazing shimmering heat, stand the brown tents of the Arabs. Even on the steamer, where was shade and movement, the heat was terrific, and what it must have been within the scanty shelter of the dirty tents, heaven only knows. A few weary-looking cattle and flocks and herds browsed here and there, and buffaloes, up to their shoulders in water, stood and watched the steamer pass. The Suez Canal is a paradise compared to this part of the Tigris in summer. Great deep cracks break the clay soil in every direction, and even the thick yellow river wears the appearance of molten metal.

These river plains extend far away to the west, in the upper portion forming the southern end of Mesopotamia, the country lying above the junction of the Tigris and Euphrates; and below where these rivers unite and form the Shatt El-Arab—as it is called—mile upon mile of dreary marsh takes their place. In the marshes all communication from village to village—for even here the Arabs



build themselves huts of reeds wherever soil appears—is by rush-boats, which they punt with long poles. What between mosquitoes and fever it is marvellous that life can be supported, and it must be allowed that the inhabitants do not appear robust.

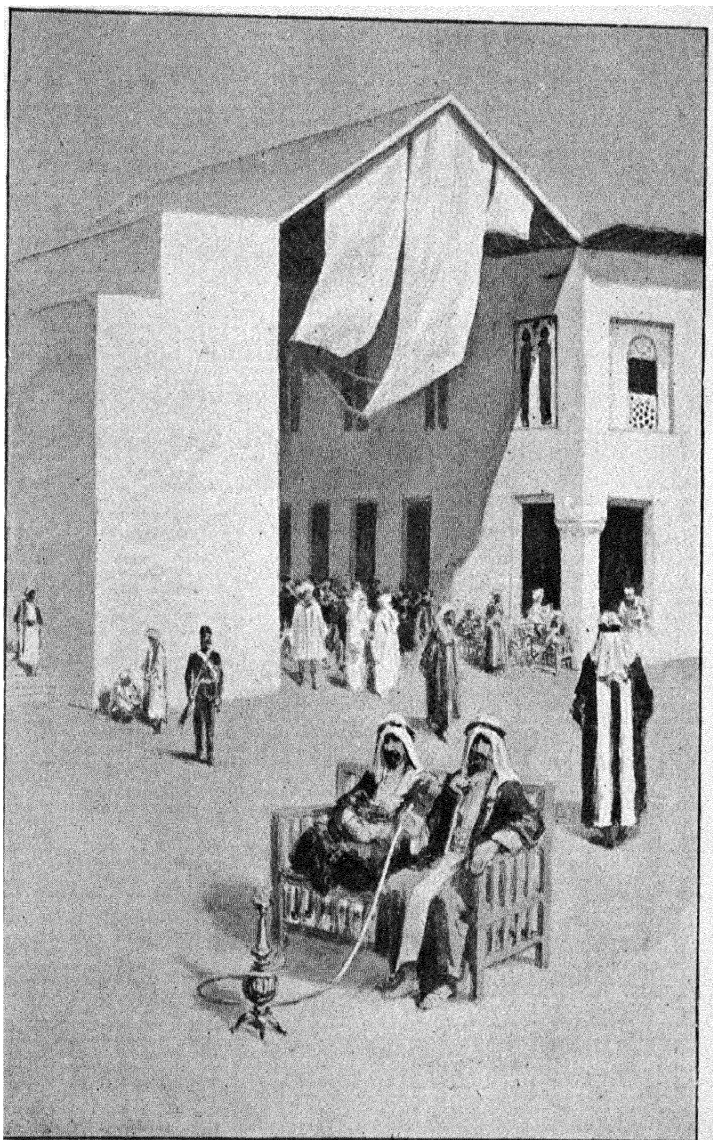
On the left (east) bank of the river the view often extends over the plain as far as the horizon, a dull dead level; but in parts there is visible the yellow barren hills of Luristan, the frontier of Turkish and Persian territory.

Once or twice during the morning we passed small mud huts, and here and there the pretence of a fort, usually a round tower built of clay. The whole garrison turned out regularly,—for the honour of the Admiral on board our steamer,—and generally numbered five men, in untidy uniforms, who gravely saluted as we passed.

We reached Kut el-Amara after dark, and stayed only for an hour or so; but my Greek servant went on shore and replenished our stores. On the whole, I was tolerably comfortable on board. The accommodation was wretched and the heat terrific; but the cook excellent, which made up for a great deal, for during the last four months or so we had lived on milk and water, with now and then a tough old fowl, and one relished—greedy as it may be to do so—well-cooked food. There was, too, on board

a regular coffee-shop, where coffee was always on the brew, and I doubt if the man in charge knew any more than I did how many cups I had ordered between Baghdad and Busra ; but I gave my servants "unlimited tick," and there were many others on board not loth to have their coffee paid for. So on the whole I fared better than could be expected in the second-class accommodation of a Turkish river-steamer.

Kut el-Amara is a thriving spot, large shipments in grain being made from it. However, instead of having to wait while the cargo was put on board, we took a couple of lighters in tow instead, an infinitely preferable plan, as we were not long delayed. It seems strange that these apparently arid plains should be capable of yielding so large a supply of grain, but such is the fact ; and it only wants a decent Government and a little engineering skill to render, as was in olden days the case, the entire district one immense corn-field. But the old canals with which water was carried to long distances have fallen into disrepair, and the Turks take no trouble, nor do they seem desirous of doing so, of renewing them. Yet even as it is, the yield of grain is very large, for it is from these districts that the vast quantity shipped annually from Busra principally comes.



ENTRANCE TO THE BAZAAR AT AMARA.



At Amara, the next town at which we stopped, I made a short excursion ashore, as the steamer lies close under the bank, alongside the entrance of the bazaar, in which it was cooler than ashore. There is, however, nothing to see, though the place is interesting as being largely inhabited by the Christian sect of Sabæans, natives who profess to be the followers of St John the Baptist, but the tenets of whose religion seem to contain both Jewish and Moslem doctrines, as well as those of Christianity. There is nothing to distinguish them in appearance from the other natives of the place. They seem to be principally engaged in trade, there being a renowned manufacture of silver objects in a kind of *niello* at this spot.

At Gurna, some five hours above Busra, the Euphrates and Tigris unite. Here, the natives say, was situated the Garden of Eden, and I was hurried ashore—in terrific heat and a very bad temper—to see “the tree”; but not being a genuine apple-tree, I am still sceptical as to the site. There is a little town on the very junction of the rivers; but description of mud houses and palm-groves, the latter of which here begin to appear, would only weary. Besides, I am thankful to say I saw so little of the place that I could venture on no details.

We reached Busra in a few hours under three days

after leaving Baghdad, — a quick passage, — and thankful indeed I was to get free of the river-steamer and its crowd of native passengers; though I would be ungrateful if I did not acknowledge here that everything that could be done for my comfort was carried out, without request, by the captain and the crew, with all of whom I parted on most intimate and friendly terms, every sailor on board—a dozen or so—insisting on shaking hands,—and even then I had to return to drink a last cup of coffee with the cook and the coffee-shop man, both gloating over a very moderate bakshish.

I found the steamer in which, through the kindness of the owners, I was offered a passage for self and servant as far as Gibraltar, already arrived. With the exception of the ships that call for grain and date cargoes, Busra is in poor communication with England, as the British India Company's steamships—the comfort of which I know from past experiences on the Indian coast—call at all the Persian Gulf ports *en route*, and proceed to Bombay, where a change has to be made to some home-going boat, a process of much time and considerable expense. But although the s.s. Collingham was already in the river, I was destined to wait in Busra over a fortnight before I could depart; for delays with her cargo occurred, and owing to her being of deep draught, she was

obliged to proceed to the bar of the river, about a hundred miles down, to complete her loading, the cargo being sent down in a steam-lighter.

This delay at Busra would have proved almost unbearable had it not been for the kindness and hospitality of Captain Knox, H.B.M. Consul at that town, who received me as a guest in his house, and there I remained until my departure, in ease and comfort. It is this genial hospitality with which one meets abroad that renders so pleasant the traveller's life ; for when one is weary after a long journey and a hot climate, the little luxuries of life are most acceptable, not least amongst them the companionship of a friend. And so it was that in Busra I spent the long hot days in the shady verandah of the consulate, with the Tigris flowing past the end of the little garden, and a floating panorama of ships and boats ever before my eyes. The delights of having completed my journey, of being able to go to bed without the knowledge that a twelve hours' ride must be made the next day, were indeed great. For enjoyable as had been my travels from first to last, a change is never to be despised, and a traveller after months of wandering knows well how to appreciate rest and peace. And rest and peace there were in my quarters at Busra ; nothing to do but lie in a cane chair and smoke and read novels and watch the river before

one, every want attended to by the kindest of hosts and an excellent staff of servants.

Of Busra itself there is little to tell. Probably the reader is weary of wading through these long pages of travel, just as the writer was weary after his experiences; yet a page or two more or less can do no harm, and Busra with its creeks and boats merits a few words of description.

The town does not lie on the river's banks, but nearly a mile inland, and so cut up is the entire neighbourhood by little canals and creeks that all communication takes place by water, in a comfortable build of boat known as a *balám*, in which one sits on the floor on a carpet and cushion, shaded from the sun by a light awning. The *balám* is progressed by means of long poles, skilfully wielded by a couple of boys or men, one at the stern and the other at the bow, bronze-skinned and half-nude creatures, picturesque in the extreme.

A long creek, fringed with palm-gardens, leads one from the European settlement on the bank of the Tigris to Busra, and no scene more bright in colour or more pleasing could be pictured than this creek at early morning. The palm-trees rise from close to the water's edge until lost to sight in the forest of straight stems beyond, while along the very edge of the creek shrubs and bushes grow luxuriantly.



Every now and then one passes some dwelling, with its balconies and windows, trellised and carved, overhanging the water. At one spot too, near the Tigris, is quite a little town, and here the creek is crossed by a wooden bridge supported on piles of the same material. At dawn the whole scene is crowded with boats, full of Arabs and natives of all classes and degrees, taking their wares to the town or engaged in the process of marketing. Picturesque groups they form, the country people in their striped *abbas* or cloaks, and with blue or gaily coloured *kifiyehs* on their heads, wound round with cords of camel's hair. And the gaudily painted boats, with their awnings often lined with dyed stuffs, add yet another touch of brilliancy to a scene already painted in bright colours. But it is only at dawn that one sees the creek thus, for as the sun rises and the heat becomes intolerable, the water, dirty and green, throws off poisonous effluvia, and the mud stirred up by the poles of the boatmen floats to the surface in black scum. Nor do the boats ply by day more than is necessary, for no one of his own choice will venture out during the heat, which is so great that even were like gay scenes to be witnessed, enjoyment would be impossible.

Of Busra itself little need be said. It presents all the disadvantages of all oriental cities, with little or

none of their picturesqueness. The streets and bazaars are poor, and the shops absolutely of no interest, and once seen, there can be no enticement for the traveller to leave his quarters on the river-banks to visit the native town a second time.

It is for its extraordinary output of dates that Busra is so celebrated, and look which way one will, whether up or down or across the river, an apparently never-ending date-forest meets the eye. So important an item does this trade prove in the welfare of Busra that some mention must be made of the manner of harvesting the fruit.

As soon as the dates are ripe the plucking begins, men being employed to climb the trees and cut and shake the dates from the stem on which they grow. The fruit is then collected into old boxes and carried to the *shadok*, or enclosure, where women are employed in sorting and packing them. The boxes in which they are shipped come from Northern Europe already sawn into shape, and require only to be nailed together. The harvesting offers work to a multitude of the country people, who flock to Busra in the autumn, though the wages seem small enough, for a kran—at the rate of exchange in July last about 4d.—is paid for packing a box, and a woman can pack three in a day. The boxes when filled are carried down in boats to the river and shipped upon

the steamers waiting for their cargoes, to be sold in the shops and street-stalls of London and elsewhere.

With these few words as to Busra I can pass on to my return voyage. It was slow and hot, at times almost unbearably hot. We spent two days in Bushire, the principal Persian port in the Gulf, a few hours at Aden, and again a few at Port Said. The time passed pleasantly enough on board, thanks to the kindness and amiability of Captain Martin and his officers; but for me it was a weary journey, for my Arab servant Mohammed, who had stood our long ride ably and well, broke down entirely in strength and lay day after day moaning and stricken with fever, accompanied by quinzey and a kind of scurvy, that gave him, for over a month, not an hour without pain and suffering. Poor fellow, he fell away to a shadow, and we had the greatest difficulty in nursing and nourishing him.

But at length one night the light on Europa Point at Gibraltar came into sight, and the following morning we bade adieu to the captain and our friends on board, and the same evening found ourselves at home again in Tangier, rejoicing that at last our journey was completed. It was well on in August now, and the weather hot, but the care of his own people and the excitement of getting home from a journey such as few of his fellow-countrymen ever took, to say

nothing of fresh nourishing food, soon pulled him round, and now, as I pen these very words, he brings me in my coffee, the picture of health and happiness. I tell him that I am writing the last words of my book, and he says, "Say Good-bye for me too"; and so I do—for both of us—"Good-bye."

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